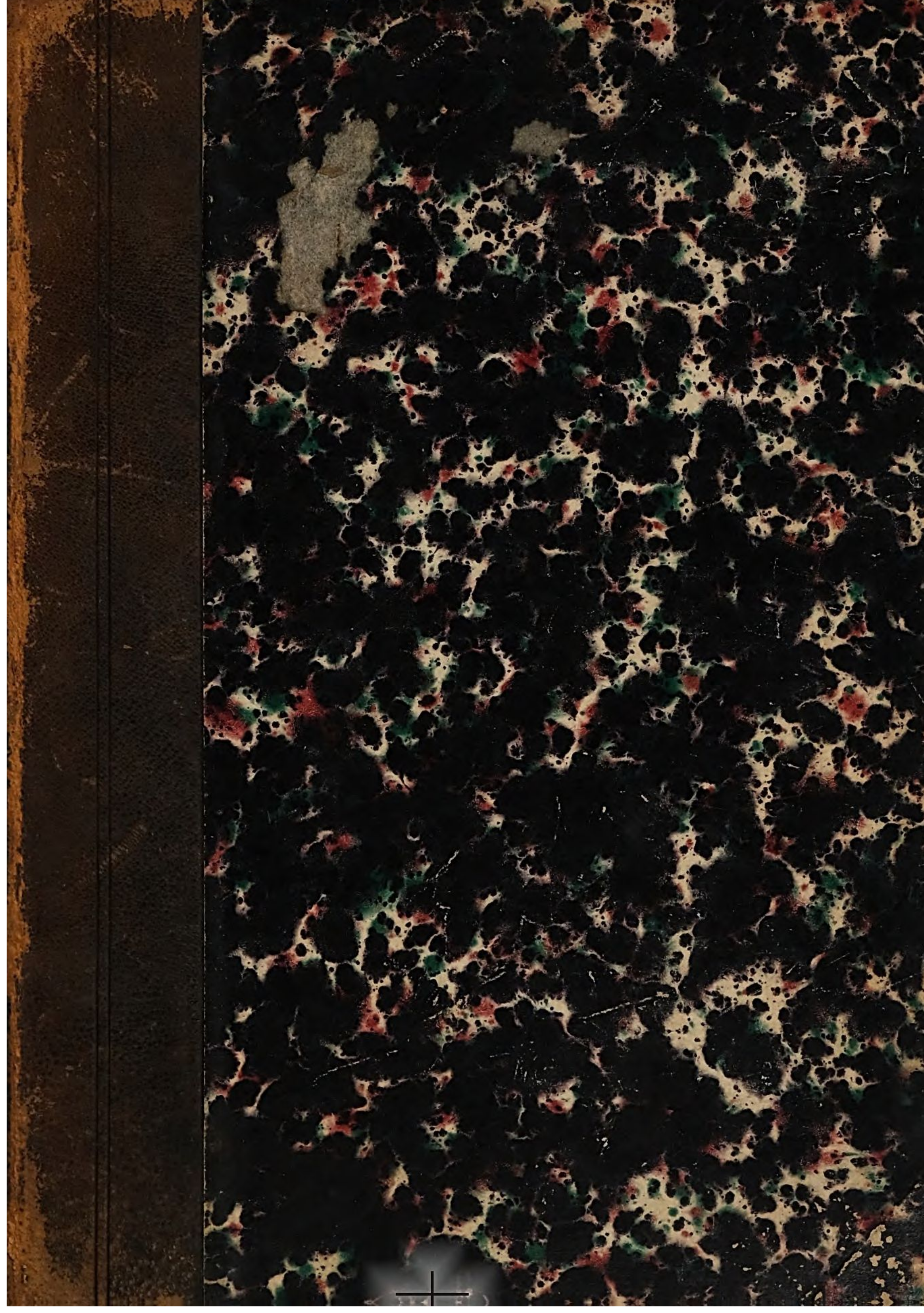




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THE REPROACH OF ANNESLEY.

BY

MAXWELL GRAY.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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THE REPROACH OF ANNESLEY BY M. GRAY.

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VOL. II.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND . 2 vols.

THE REPROACH
OF
ANNESLEY

A NOVEL

BY

MAXWELL GRAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1889.

THE REFROY

ANNALS

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THE REPROACH OF ANNESLEY.



P A R T IV.

(CONTINUED.)

THE REPORT OF ANNALS

BY T. H. H.

1870

CHAPTER II.

THE QUESTION.

THE business for which Annesley had wished to see Gervase Rickman was soon done, and did not involve even going into the house. While they were still talking and pacing up and down beneath the fresh-leaved trees, Hubert the deer-hound came bounding up in his long sweeping stride and placed his muzzle confidently in Edward's hand, looking up at him with a world of affection in his soft dark eyes.

"This creature loves me," he said, patting his head; "dogs are whimsical in their likings: some instinct must tell him that I like him."

"He takes no notice of me, the brute," replied Gervase with asperity; he was jealous of the dog, who favoured him with a watchful side-long glance. "I had to thrash him once, and he never forgave it."

"And I never will," was the mute response in Hubert's eye.

"His mistress cannot be far off," Gervase added; "perhaps you will come in, Annesley—the ladies are all at home."

"I had intended calling before I heard that you were here," he replied with a hesitating air. "Oh, there is your father," he said, catching sight of Mr. Rickman, who was issuing from the hall porch with his usual bewildered air, as if he had just waked from a sound sleep, and was wondering where on earth he was. In a moment Annesley had joined the old gentleman and was asking him to give him a few minutes in private, to which Mr. Rickman readily assented, taking him to his study, an apartment which had formerly suggested a necromancer's cave to Edward's boyish imagination, stuffed as it was with all kinds of uncanny things—fossils, skeletons, minerals, insects, and odd bones, with unpleasant-looking bottles in which reptiles appeared to be writhing and turning.

A chair was with some difficulty cleared from the general overflow of papers, parchments and books, and placed opposite Mr. Rickman's own arm-chair, in which he sat, regarding his guest attentively and trying to remember if he had recently applied to him on any subject connected with the house or land which he held of him. For Edward Annesley had for some months past been in undisputed possession of the Gledesworth estates, though there had at first been some difficulty in getting probate of Paul's will in consequence of the body not having been found. Gervase, however, had managed cleverly, so that the Gledesworth affairs had been settled in a surprisingly short time. His evidence as an eye-witness of the death had satisfied the Court

of Probate, before which Edward Annesley had not been summoned.

A vague notion that rent must be due was the sole result of Mr. Rickman's mental interrogation, which continued for some seconds, while Annesley sat silent, looking down upon a pile of dusty volumes heaped pell-mell at his feet.

"I think, Mr. Rickman," he said at last, "that you are Miss Lingard's guardian."

"I am one of her trustees, I never was her guardian; she will soon be of age," he replied, surprised at the question.

"At all events," continued Annesley, "you stand in place of a father to her."

"She is my adopted child, Annesley," he replied; "she is the same to us as our own daughter—we have had her so long. I question whether the tie of consanguinity is as strong as is generally supposed. There is no trace of it in the lower animals; family feelings in man are the result of imagination, strengthened by religion, inherited social instincts, and above all of habit. Perhaps I may be permitted to observe——"

"And habit has made Miss Lingard your daughter, sir," interrupted Edward. "I need not tell you what my circumstances are, because you know. I came to tell you that I have long loved your adopted daughter, and desire your permission to pay my addresses to her."

"You wish," replied Mr. Rickman in extreme amazement, "to marry—Alice?"

"Yes. It seemed right to ask your permission before asking hers."

Mr. Rickman very deliberately removed his glasses, and, taking his handkerchief, began to polish them with extreme diligence. Having assured himself of their spotless brilliance, he replaced them at his eyes with accurate care and looked through them thoughtfully at his guest.

"My permission," he repeated with a troubled air—"my permission. My dear Mr. Annesley, this is a very great surprise to me—a very great surprise. I had understood—I had been led to suppose—Ah! perhaps you are not aware that Miss Lingard's affections have already been given—your poor cousin."

Edward's face darkened, but his gaze met Mr. Rickman's steadily.

"Your poor cousin," continued Mr. Rickman, "had been paying his addresses to her for some time at the date of his death; I am told, with only too good success. Certainly the poor child has never been the same since."

"I know it," he replied, "and on that account do not expect to win her in a moment."

Mr. Rickman moved uneasily in his chair and looked out of the lattice window into the drooping gold splendour of a laburnum, and watched the languid flight of a bee humming about the blossom.

"I do not recommend you to prosecute the suit, Mr. Annesley," he said after a pause. "Alice is a wo-

man of deep feeling; she will not forget her dead lover quickly, if at all. You will only waste time and hope."

"That is my concern," he returned. "The question is, have I your permission—have you anything to urge against me?"

As he said this, he looked so steadily and even sternly at Mr. Rickman, and his breath came so quickly through his nostrils above his close-shut lips, that the old gentleman's mild eyes quailed and fell, and he looked the picture of embarrassed misery, fidgeting on his chair as if it had been the gridiron of St. Lawrence, seeking words and finding none.

"Is there any reason why I may not ask Miss Lingard to be my wife?" repeated Edward sternly.

"My dear Edward," replied Mr. Rickman, driven to bay, "you must be aware that there is a—a certain stigma upon your name—a—a reproach."

"What reproach?" he demanded proudly.

"My dear Annesley, I believe you incapable of the wrong imputed to you, pray believe that. If I thought differently, of course I should not have received you at my house and allowed my family to enter yours. But you must acknowledge that such a stigma is a serious drawback."

"I acknowledge it," he replied.

"I think," continued Mr. Rickman, "that the stigma might be removed by the simple expedient of relating in detail all that you did on that unfortunate afternoon.

There seems to be a hiatus in your narrative, which no doubt you could easily fill."

"You are mistaken, sir," he replied. "No words of mine could remove the stigma, such as it is. I could not fill the hiatus. All I can do is to live it down, as I shall in time. I have a bitter enemy; who may repent. The question is, do you forbid me to ask your adopted child to marry me?"

"It is very sad," sighed Mr. Rickman, mournfully playing with a paper-knife. "Very sad. But I can scarcely venture to forbid you. I must refer you to Alice herself. I shall not forbid her, but should she seek counsel of me, I should certainly not advise her to marry a man who is—forgive me for saying what is no doubt too well known to you—ostracized by his class." But it was not the public ostracism which weighed most with Mr. Rickman; he thought that Edward owed a full explanation to the family into which he proposed to marry.

"If I am cut by the county," replied Edward, "I need not live at Gledesworth. I have already offered my mother and sisters the choice of any place they like to live in. We could let or leave Gledesworth. But the best plan for me is to stay and live it down. And my mother has agreed to stand by me and face it out."

"I have protested," said Mr. Rickman, with an air of relief, "according to my duty. I will say no more. (Besides," he reflected, "as she is certain not to accept

him, it does not really matter whether I object or not.) I do not forbid your suit, but I warn you that it will not be successful. Under the circumstances, you are the last man to make Alice false to the memory of Paul Annesley."

Edward thanked him and rose to take leave of him. "You are very good to me, Mr. Rickman," he said, shaking his hand; "and though you do not encourage me, at least believe that I will do my best to be worthy of her."

"Don't go yet, they are all at home, I think," said Mr. Rickman, satisfied that he had fully done his duty in throwing all his faculties into the interests of everyday life for a time, and glad to retire mentally into his world of abstractions and theories once more; "let us go and find them."

Edward and Alice had scarcely met since Paul's death. On the rare occasions of his calling at Arden Manor, she had seldom appeared, and although she visited his mother and sisters at Gledesworth Park, her visits had occurred when he was away with his battery. Once or twice they had met in the street at Medington, where Alice often paid visits of weeks' duration to Mrs. Walter Annesley, who lived on still in her creeper-covered house in the High Street, though in greater state than of old; but they had not stopped to speak to each other, on account of Mrs. Annesley's presence. For Mrs. Annesley had refused to meet any of the Gledesworth Annesleys since her son's death. She had

been much discomposed at the readiness with which probate of her son's will had been granted by the Court. She complained to Gervase that Edward ought to have been summoned as a witness of the death. At which Gervase smiled mysteriously, and observed that it was unnecessary, since the Court entertained no suspicion that he had evidence to give. Only those present in court knew what Gervase's deposition was; the transaction was too unimportant to be published.

Once Alice, at Gervase's request, had attended a political meeting at which the county member addressed his constituents, previous to an election. Paul had then been dead about seven months, and Edward, overpersuaded by Gervase, had consented to make one of the party on the platform and deliver a brief speech if called upon to do so. Except the member and one or two inferior local politicians, no one there had appeared aware of his existence.

When it came to his turn to speak, he stood up and gazed with dim eyes and a whirling brain upon the unaccustomed sight of a sea of expectant human faces beneath him. He was too nervous to notice that the applause, which in some measure greeted the rising of every other speaker, and which in Gervase's case had been tumultuous, was not forthcoming for him, nor did his unaccustomed ear catch an ominous sibilation which grew into loud hisses. Once he had plunged into a burning house and rescued some sleeping children, rushing through a sheet of flame to what seemed a certain

death, with closed eyes, singeing hair and sobbing breath. With the same feeling of mortal agony and the same determined hardening of his heart he now plunged into the scorching flame of public speech, and was greatly surprised when his preliminary "Ladies and gentlemen" floated tranquilly through the building without provoking any convulsion of nature, or even bringing the roof down, and he said without hesitation or circumlocution that he approved of the programme just presented to them by their member. Having done this in about six words, he paused, reflecting that he might as well sit down, since he had nothing more to say, and wishing the others would be as expeditious, when the momentary silence was broken by the following sentence flung out in a high harsh voice from the back benches, "Who killed Paul Annesley?"

Cries of "Order!" and "Turn him out!" made a momentary confusion, and then Edward, roused to defiance, with the sweat standing on his face, began again, his nerves steadied by the spirit of battle, and dilated upon some detail of the member's programme, interrupted by hisses, whistles and cries of "Cain!" "Cain!" until he had to sit down, at the instance of those near him, in spite of his fierce determination to face the matter out.

Gervase afterwards maintained that these cries came from purely Conservative sources, and were merely an attempt to obstruct and break up the Liberal meeting; but as the meeting passed off quietly after the police

had forcibly ejected one or two ardent spirits, it was difficult to believe that the personality had only a political origin.

"He should have left the room," Alice said, discussing it afterwards.

"Oh, no!" objected Sibyl. "It was better to face it out, like the brave man he is."

"He will never again take an active part in local politics," commented Gervase. "I wish I had not advised him to begin so soon."

When Mrs. Walter Annesley heard of the occurrence, she laughed and observed that Heaven was just; but to Alice she said nothing, the two having agreed that Edward Annesley's name was not to be mentioned between them.

When Mr. Rickman conducted Edward from his study after their private interview, they found Alice and Sibyl in the garden behind the house, entertaining Horace Merton and his sister, a child of twelve, who had strolled in from the vicarage. The grey ridge of down had a solemn effect against the tranquil blue sky, and, but for the fulness of the leaves, the loss of the apple-bloom and the difference of the flowers bordering the broad turf walk, the scene was the same as on that April day the year before, when Paul and Edward had surprised each other there. The pungent fragrance of burning weeds helped the similitude, and the tall St. Joseph's lilies, with their dazzling white petals and hearts of virgin gold, stood as sentinels behind Alice,

in place of the soldier-like narcissus, which had then poised their green lances and held their heads erect behind her.

Alice rose from the bench on which she was sitting and came to meet him; when she took his offered hand he looked in search of the old unspeakable something he had formerly seen there, but he found nothing save a settled sorrow in the glance that met his. His heart misgave him, and he knew that he must wait before he could win her; her loss was still too fresh. He sat there like one in a dream, gazing at the young people who were shooting at the target, and stroking the head Hubert laid on his knee, while Mrs. Rickman chatted tranquilly, and Gervase preluded upon his violin at a little distance, where he could see everybody and watch them, thinking many thoughts which his music helped.

When Alice came to the tea-table Edward placed his chair for her and stood at her side, leaning against a tree, and began hoping that she would not fail to be one of the luncheon party at Gledesworth at the end of the week.

"If you do not come this time," he said in a low tone, so that others might not hear, "I shall begin to think you have some quarrel against me."

"Oh! Mr. Annesley," she replied earnestly, "pray do not think that."

"I have enemies," he continued in the same low voice. "I hope you are not among them. You promised once that you would be my friend, if you remember."

"And I am your friend," she replied, raising her eyes and speaking very clearly though softly and a little tremulously; "I could never be otherwise."

"Thank you," he replied, and he almost started when he discovered Gervase close at hand offering him a seat, to take which obliged him to leave Alice, since her chair was on the outside of the semicircle, and the only vacant chair was at the other end next Sibyl, who turned at his approach and welcomed him with her usual cordial smile.

"Do you *like* being in the army, Mr. Annesley?" asked little Kate Merton across the table all of a sudden, in a silence which followed some peaceful and commonplace discussion.

"Naturally, Miss Kate. I entered the service of my own will," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Then how will you like having to leave it?" continued the child. "Papa says you were recommended to resign——"

"Kate, be quiet," muttered her brother, pinching her.

"Well, he did, Horace, you heard him," she went on, "and you said it was as good as being turned out."

"If ever I go out again with that brat!" thought Horace, trying to stop the child's tongue; but Edward would not have her quieted.

"You may tell your papa that I have not been recommended to resign," he said. "You need not scold your sister, Mr. Merton; she merely shows me what a

very kind interest people take in my affairs," he added sarcastically.

After this the conversation was forced and spasmodic; Edward wondered if the fact of his having actually been recommended to leave the service by a brother officer of subaltern rank, as a means of escaping a coldness that threatened to grow into ostracism, could possibly have become known, and so have given rise to this report.

He sat silent, with a gloomy face and eyes bent on the turf at his feet. Sibyl looked at him, the soft fire of her dark eyes clouded with pity, and the tenderest sympathy speaking from her face. Her father, usually so unobservant, surprised the look, and his own lined face softened. "What a pity!" he thought to himself, "my clever little Sib!" Gervase saw it and his face darkened; Alice saw nothing but the grass on which her eyes, like Edward's, were bent in silent melancholy. Then Edward looked up and caught the full stress of yearning compassion in Sibyl's guileless face and his heart was touched; for a sympathy so complete, so mute, and so impotent is rarely seen in a human face, but sometimes in a faithful animal's loving gaze. For an instant Sibyl's beautiful soul seemed to meet his and surprise him with its sweetness; then a ripple of laughter passed over her face, and she began to rally him on his melancholy. "We are all so dull and heavy to-night, there must be thunder in the air," she said. "Alice, do tell us how you went to the Dorcas meeting

at Medington and how the curate came in to tea with the fifty Dorcas ladies. I often wonder what we should do if curates were abolished," she added. "There would be nothing to amuse people in little towns."

"Oh! this story is too humiliating to our poor sex," replied Alice, rousing herself from painful thought; "besides, I leave all the little malicious tales to you, Sibyl; no one can surpass you in that line."

"Unlucky curate, to fall into Sibbie's hands," commented Gervase.

But not even Sibyl's matchless description of the solitary and bashful curate having tea with fifty grimly virtuous ladies could beguile the heaviness from Edward Annesley's face, though he joined in the laughter it provoked; nor did all the merry discussions and illustrations of curate-worship as practised in the Anglican communion, which Gervase enriched by anecdotes, more amusing than authentic, appear to interest him.

Some haunting care embittered everything; he had the preoccupied look of a man who is perpetually remembering something he would like to forget.

CHAPTER III.

AT SUNSET.

THE Mertons left early, and Gervase Rickman looked at Edward, thinking he would follow them, which he did not. Mr. Rickman had long since vanished into the charmed privacy of his study, and Mrs. Rickman had gone in to avoid the dew, but sat at work in a window looking out on the garden.

"I must go to the shearers' supper," Gervase said at last. "Perhaps, Annesley, you would not care to look in as well. You would find the humours of a shear-feast stale?"

"Of course he would," Sibyl replied for him. "But I shall go and have my health drunk. Nonsense, Gervase, I shall go. You know I always look in for a minute. Come at once."

She took her brother's arm and bore him off protesting, laughingly, it is true, yet seriously annoyed with Sibyl for coming with him, and angry at Annesley's bad taste in remaining with Alice.

The shearers' supper was spread in the kitchen, a long, low, dark room with black oaken beams, filled now with the odour of hot food, the sound of knives

and forks and human voices, and the Rembrandt shadows caused by the firelight playing on the mixture of dusk and steam.

Good ale and good beef had by this time brought the slow heavy machinery of rustic speech into full play. Raysh Squire was telling his best story: that of the smugglers hidden in a tomb, whose morning uprising from their hiding-place made some early labourers, going to their work, think the Last Day was come. John Nobbs had just brought forth a new and powerful joke, at the remembrance of which he still chuckled. He was considering which of his songs, "In the low-lands low," or "A gentle maiden, fair and young," he should sing. Sibyl would fain have lingered at this scene, the unsophisticated humours of which pleased her lively fancy, but after the singing of

"Here's a health unto our Meäster, the vounder of the veäst," Gervase insisted on her going.

She went out slowly, and leaving the house and garden passed round by the barns, and strolled away in the balmy June gloaming, until she reached the belt of firs, the moaning music of which was now still for awhile; there she stopped and saw the first pale stars tremble into the transparent lemon-tinted sky.

She turned her face to the beautiful west, leant her arms upon the rail-fence, beyond which the shorn sheep were browsing with plaintive bleating and mellow bell-tinkling, and watched the familiar miracle of the star-rising with all the enthusiasm of romantic youth; her

ardent imagination conjuring up visions and suggesting aspirations, hidden from others: for Sibyl had the sublime misfortune to be a poet, as if being a woman was not bad enough.

A nightingale's song, mellow, rich and turbulent, poured from a copse hard by, and the tears sprang to Sibyl's eyes.

"When the world is so beautiful," she mused, "and there is the hope of one still more beautiful, what can we want more?"

She fell into a train of thought, trying to find out and give expression to the broad general meaning of those confused and conflicting currents which make up the full stream of human life. The best thing in youth, next to its unspoiled capacity for enjoyment, is the limitless field of vision and conjecture which its dim future offers. Sibyl stood solitary and pensive in the summer twilight and mused upon human life, and her own little portion of it, trying to picture what the future might bring her, with an ardent face and infinite depths of thought in her dark eyes. She saw her parents bending under the burden of years, and clinging to her for support; she saw herself expressing thoughts which sometimes threatened to consume her, and establishing a subtle sympathy between herself and thousands of unknown souls. But one side of life might never fully be revealed to her, a whole sequence of joys and sorrows must be denied her, she could be only the spectator of the leading events in the drama of life. Thus, she

reflected, she might get a truer image of the whole than if her vision were distorted by the storm and stress of personal experience. For some deep instinct made a fair unbroken view of life necessary to Sibyl.

So these thoughts came to her as she lingered beneath the firs, her bright face lifted to the sky and irradiated by its lustre; these and others too deep or too sad to be uttered.

In the meantime Edward found the opportunity he had so carefully sought. He was alone with Alice, whose spirit was stirred by the thought that a crisis in her life was approaching, and still more by the fear that she might be too weak to pass triumphantly through it. They strolled silently between the tall white sentinel lilies, the dazzling petals of which shone in glorious purity against the green of the espaliers. Edward was too overcharged with feeling to speak, and his heart misgave him when he observed how changed Alice's face was since the day when first he saw it. If the face had been dear then, it was tenfold dearer now, though the first glory of youth was gone and its early lustre dimmed. During the past months Alice had suffered a wearing, wasting pain, which he was far from divining, and the perpetual conflict, while marring the beauty of her face, had left its stamp in an ethereal charm only seen in those who, like Jacob, have wrestled spiritually and prevailed. The patriarch halted on his thigh after that night's wrestling. No one may issue

alive unscarred from such conflict, and Alice never regained her youthful bloom. Her face was thin, her eyes were too bright. And though this suffering was, as he thought, for another, it endeared her to the man who loved her so truly.

Of late she had fought hard against the conclusion which had forced itself upon her by the river side. Whenever she saw Edward she could not accept the verdict her reason forced upon her. So it came to pass that her thoughts continually buffeted her and gave her no rest; she rose in the mornings burdened by the weight of another's guilt, and struggled mentally all the day, till at night she lay down with the hope that some misconception existed, and that a straightforward recital of all that occurred on that most unhappy afternoon would remove the stigma from Edward Annesley's name, only to rise and renew the conflict on the morrow. And to-day when he uttered those few words at the tea-table, his voice, the silent devotion in his manner, and the light in his eyes, stirred a new feeling in her, which should have been hope, but was fear. Till now she had not thought that he loved her; she had accepted Gervase's theory that his jealousy, unlike Paul's, was the evil fruit of a passing fancy. His very silence, as they paced the turf-walk in the balmy evening, told her more eloquently of his love than any speech; and the wild flutter of pulses within her told her too truly that she loved him in return.

After all she was the first to speak; the pent-up

resolve to question him at all hazards breaking forth almost before she was aware of it.

"Mr. Annesley," she said gently and calmly, in spite of the thick heart-beats which nearly choked her, "I am glad to be alone with you for a moment. I wish to ask you a very serious question."—She stopped, facing him, and looked down on the grass at their feet, where the closed daisies really looked like pearls, *margaritæ*.—"You will perhaps think it impertinent."

"How could I?" he remonstrated, recovering from the first shock of surprise. "Any and every question you care to ask can be but an honour to me."

"You have asked me more than once to be your friend," she continued, "and in that name I venture to ask this, not from curiosity or any mean motive, but solely for your own sake."

"Dearest Miss Lingard, this is too good of you," he replied, when she paused at a loss for further speech. "I too have something to ask and something to say, but I will hear first," he said, smiling, "what your commands are."

Alice still looked down upon the closed heads of the daisies, her hands nervously locked together before her, her lips compressed, and her face full of feeling and purpose. The setting sun threw a glory upon her; swallows wheeled in the pure pale sky overhead; sheep-bells, farmyard sounds, birds' songs, and the voices of village children at play, came borne in softened tones upon the still evening air; opening roses, meadow

clover, lily scents, and the vague perfume of the young foliage, breathed a charm of fragrance about the two lovers, to whom the whole earth seemed charged with the meaning and melody of etherealized passion. Alice could scarcely find words to express her burning thoughts.

"You suffer," she said at last, "under an imputation—that is all the more terrible because it is so vague."

Edward started as if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart; the whole world changed for him, the sunlight was grey, and the air lost its balm.

"Yes," he replied.

"I have thought," she went on, her heart beating still more rapidly, "much upon it. And I have thought that you might remove this—this reproach."

"I cannot," he replied, pale and agitated—"Alice, I cannot."

Alice's memory vibrated with the words she had heard in the pine-wood. "Promise that you will never tell.—All need never be known.—Above all *she* must never know." She knew now that she was the Helen of that fratricidal strife.

"Oh, do not say that!" she cried. "Surely, surely you should tell all that happened on that day. Perhaps, after all, you *have* told all?" she pleaded, pressing her hands together in the intensity of her hope. "Oh! you have told all, and what is rumoured of something concealed is only scandal," she urged, though his own

words about concealment sounded in her memory, even as she spoke, like a funeral knell.

He turned away, and then he turned again and looked in her agitated face.

"You mean well, dearest Miss Lingard," he said, "but this discussion is as useless as it is painful. I can bear the burden, such as it is. I shall live it down. After all, what is the opinion of others?"

"Is my opinion nothing?" she asked.

"It is everything. Alice, Alice; think as kindly of me as you can. I love you, Alice, I loved you the first moment I saw you; do not mistrust me."

He had now taken her hands and obliged her to look at him, which she did through tears.

"Tell me the whole truth," she said.

"No, Alice; believe in me, but do not ask me this," he replied. "Of all people I can never tell *you* the story of that hour."

"Would it not ease your mind to speak freely to one who—who—who is your friend?" she continued, in a way that touched him.

"No," he answered; "no. It cannot be. I must ask you to bury this subject in your memory for ever. Dearest Alice, I know what sorrow fell upon you on that day. I have not spoken to you of my feelings since, because I respected your grief. But what is past is past, and cannot be changed, and you are young and without near ties. And I have loved you, faithfully and truly, ever since that day when I first saw you. And

I came here to-day to ask you—not to be my wife—it is over-soon for you to think of that, but to begin a new life and think of my need of you, and let me see you from time to time and try to win you. When you know that my whole heart is bound up in you, will you not try to take me for your husband?”

Alice disengaged the hands he had been clasping in the growing intensity of his words, and stood a little farther from him, pausing before she replied, with a strong resolve to put away feeling and listen only to duty.

“Do you know what you are saying, Mr. Annesley?” she asked at last; “you come to me with a stain upon you, and you refuse to move it by an explanation.”

“Time will efface that stain,” he replied, shrinking slightly beneath her words, which cut him to the heart. “And though I am stout enough to face the world’s scorn and bear the burden myself, I should never ask a wife to share it. I would ask her to leave this place and let me find her a home, where these rumours have not been heard. I know that this is a disadvantage, but if love can atone for anything, my love is strong enough to atone for this. If you could once learn to love me, Alice, and you might in time, the world’s opinion would weigh lightly with you.”

She was dumb with amazement. The man who stood before her, exalted by honest feeling, his face earnest, and his voice eloquent with it, *could* not be guilty of what was imputed to him. Nor could he be

a dissimulator. Her heart went out to him, she longed for mental blindness, she would have given half her life not to have overheard his compact with Gervase, or Gervase's subsequent hints. If she could but wipe that hour from her memory and trust him, as he expected her to trust him, then she could give herself to him with perfect unreserve and share the burden that was pressing so heavily upon him, with no reproach from her conscience.

"Mr. Annesley," she replied coldly at last, "you cannot love me if you do not trust me. And if you trusted me, you would confide your secret to me."

"My secret!" a red flash rushed over his face. "Why do you attribute a secret to *me*? I see that I can never win your love, since I have not won your trust."

He turned away, his face dark in the chill twilight, and the misery in it went to Alice's heart. "Let me trust you," she besought him, "tell me what foundation there is for these dark surmises. Believe me, Mr. Annesley, I should *like* to trust you," she added with a pathos which moved and yet gladdened him. Surely there was a little love in that beseeching voice, he thought, and he seemed to see it in the face upon which he turned to gaze in the pale twilight.

"Trust me," he said, his voice vibrating with strong feeling, "trust me perfectly with a large unquestioning trust. Remember, once for all, I *cannot* clear up this mystery. You do not know what you ask, or you would never ask it. Trust me."

Alice began to tremble again, and she clasped her hands together with a silent prayer for guidance. It would be so sweet to say "I trust you;" but, knowing what she knew, so wrong; the thing she was asked to condone was too terrible.

"No," she replied, "I cannot trust one who does not trust me."

He was silent and heart-struck. Once more he turned aside and gazed blankly away over the balmy garden, where the flowers poised their heads in a dreamy stillness that seemed to yearn for speech, and a brown mystery of shadow was being woven about the trees away to the firs, beneath which Sibyl was standing unseen, to the meadows where the sheep were grazing tranquilly in the mystic gloaming, to the copse from the green heart of which a nightingale was singing, to the hill dark against a sky bright with the afterglow and pierced by a few pale faint stars.

"I do trust you, and I love you as I shall never love again," he said, after a brief, sharp spasm of pain, "but it is all over now. Only think as kindly as you can of me, Alice, and remember me when you want a friend."

He was going, but an overpowering impulse moved her to recall him.

"Stay," she cried, "do not go like this."

He came back quickly, took her hands, and spoke without reserve, wild words of passion.

"Hush!" she cried; "do not speak like that," and he was silent.

"Think it over," he said, presently, "I can wait. Say that I may come again later."

The apparition of Gervase at the end of the turf-walk made them start asunder, and they went to meet him, the agitation in their faces hidden by the friendly dusk. Gervase appeared surprised to see them. "I thought you had gone long ago, Annesley," he said, apparently untroubled by the thought that his company was superfluous. "What a charming night! Somebody said Sibyl was out here; have you seen her, Alice?"

"It is later than I thought," said Edward; "these long days deceive one. There is no real night."

"The moon will rise soon," returned Gervase; "you had better wait for her. I envy your ride over the downs. When are you and I to have our moonlight stroll, Alice?"

"Not to-night," she replied, "I am tired." And when they reached the garden door, she vanished with a brief "good-night" into the shadowed house, responding by a slight inclination of the head to Edward's murmured injunction "Write."

Then he rode away in the dewy silence, and thought it all over with a heavy heart in which there glowed scarcely a spark of hope. Over the ghostly downs in the faint dusk and in the rising moonlight he rode, up and down and across for miles and miles, and every

rood of land over which he rode was his own. He looked sadly at his fair inheritance sleeping tranquilly in the magical moonlight, woodland, farm and field spread over the undulating down land, and in the plain beneath; he would have given half his life to be free of it, for the price he had paid for it was too heavy. The face of Paul, as he had last seen it, dark with passion and bitter with mockery, floated before him ghostlike, and took the ethereal sweetness from the moonlight, and dimmed the glory of the calm infinite night. He saw well that the dead Paul was as serious a barrier as the living one had been. Even if Alice recovered from her sorrow, this silence between them must ever keep them apart; since she did not trust him he could never hope to win her love.

While he rode away thus in the dim, summer night, the tranquil household at Arden quieted down, and when the family had retired for the night, Sibyl knocked at Alice's door and entered her room.

"Have you anything to say to me to-night?" she asked.

"Nothing," replied Alice, who was accustomed to this little formula, the prelude to some sisterly confidence; "have you anything to confess?"

"My sins have not been very black to-day," replied Sibyl, kissing her with unwonted tenderness, "but I thought—Alice, have you sent him away?"

Alice silently kissed her.

"All the world is against him," continued Sibyl; "you should stand by his side."

Alice burst into tears and said nothing.

"Is it because you believe these hateful scandals?" Sibyl went on. "Surely you cannot think there is any truth in them?"

"I think," said Alice, lifting her head from Sibyl's shoulder, "that he ought to clear himself."

"How could he?"

"He should make a full and clear statement of all that he did that afternoon."

"Yes. And publish it in the papers, and make the town-crier proclaim it in Medington streets," retorted Sibyl, scornfully, "and who would believe it?"

It had not occurred to Alice before that he could not now clear himself; that the more he noticed the vague accusations lodged against him, the more substance they would take; that nothing short of a public trial, with its formal charges and formal refutation of them, ending in an acquittal, could efface the stain upon him. If a man is said to be an untrustworthy man, it is impossible to disprove the charge; if he is accused of forgery, he cannot be held guilty until the charge is supported by reliable evidence. No special accusation could be brought against Edward Annesley, the worst that was urged against him was matter of surmise at the most. The case stood thus: the cousins had quarrelled, and it was known that they had been near each other, if not together, within a few minutes

of the violent death of one; it was not known where the survivor was at the moment of the accident, the fatal termination of which only was witnessed by a third person. The death was of great advantage to the survivor, the motive for crime was present. The fact that the dead man's mother refused to meet his heir and her nearest kinsman was impressive. How all this was known, and how all these surmises and conjectures had been built upon the foundation of facts known only to a few persons, and occurring in a foreign country, was a mystery that Edward Annesley and his friends vainly attempted to solve.

"He must have some deadly enemy," Sibyl had said once, whereupon Gervase advised her not to repeat that observation.

"If you wish to ruin a person's reputation," he added, "the best way is to lay some charge against him that admits no disproof and get it well talked about."

"True," replied Mr. Rickman, who was present, "a germ of fact infinitesimal in magnitude, accompanied by a certain bias, when passed through the minds and mouths of numerous narrators, develops to enormous and unexpected proportions. Each narrator adds from a defective or careless memory; hearsays are reported as witnessed facts; imagination supplies gaps and enhances details, because the innate artistic feeling of mankind demands a properly proportioned story. A savage performs some isolated feat of endurance, he develops into a hero; the deeds of several such heroes,

are in the course of time attributed to one, whose actions gradually become miraculous, until in the course of ages the brave savage is a god. Such are myths, such is the legendary dawn of history."

These words Alice remembered now, acknowledging their justice, and bitterly regretting and censuring the concealment, which she thought the cause of the whole imbroglio.

Better, far better for Edward, she thought, it would have been, had he given himself up to the Cantonal authorities as having been the accidental cause of his cousin's death, if, as she supposed, that death had occurred in the course of a quarrel or struggle in which both had forgotten the dangerous nature of the ground on which they stood. If, as she had often hoped, Edward had merely witnessed the accident, why did he not report what he saw? why was there any concealment? was he afraid of attaching suspicion or blame to himself? Was he, in short, a coward?

"After all," said Sibyl, at the end of their conference in Alice's chamber that night, "what do these calumnies matter? They naturally pain him. But he will soon live them down." Which was but an echo of Edward's words in the garden that night, Alice reflected, as the door closed upon Sibyl, and left her to the unwelcome companionship of her own thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFLICT.

SIBYL's reasoning could not quiet the fever in Alice's breast. The words Edward Annesley had used on the fatal afternoon when he implored Gervase's silence, rang in her ears and would ring for ever, and the *Edelweiss* she had seen in his hat was always bearing witness against him. How could the cousins have exchanged hats? and why did Edward remove the *Edelweiss* as soon as he perceived it? The only solution was that he had had some part in the accident, involving the temporary loss of his own hat as well as of Paul's, and had taken Paul's by mistake. It was still possible that Edward's part in the accident was innocent, or, at least unintentional; Paul might have been the aggressor; but if Edward's part was innocent, why did he conceal it? Ah! why? was the weary burden of the perpetual strife within her.

Few things were more hateful to Alice in the proud purity of her own transparent truthfulness than anything approaching to deceit. It was painful to her to have to withhold the most innocent truth. She could not conceive, in the noble simplicity of her nature, that an

honourable man could be ashamed to publish any incident in his life. She could not respect a man with any such concealment. Yet she loved him; she would willingly have yielded up her life if she could but see the veil lifted, and Edward's honour and integrity shining clear and unsullied behind it.

There was no rest for her that night; she knew that a worse conflict than any she had yet endured must be struggled through before dawn. She said her usual prayers mechanically, she could not drive the one subject from her thoughts, and then she sent up that inarticulate cry for help, which the soul utters in its extremity, and which is more eloquent, or at least more earnest, than any syllabled prayer.

The moon had risen and the night was warm and still. Alice wanted air, the anguish within her bid fair to stifle her. She extinguished her lights and sat by the open lattice, gazing out into the vast calm night, wrestling inwardly, half in prayer, half in thought. Sibyl came back on some trivial errand and saw her sitting there, pale and statuesque, shrouded from head to foot in a luminous veil of moon-beams, her head resting on her hand, her gaze directed to the pale pure sky, which was studded with celestial watch-fires made faint by the white moonlight. The girls knew each other's moods, and Sibyl withdrew, aware that it was useless to say anything. Her heart ached for Alice; she carried the picture of the still and suffering figure traced upon the night's faint darkness, and etherealized by the

fairy web of white rays woven about her, into the perplexed wonderland of her own fantastic dreams.

Over and over again did Alice argue the case for the prosecution and that for the defence, with varying but always unsatisfactory verdict. What steeled her heart most against Edward was the fact of his enjoying Paul's inheritance. If some angry or accidental violence on his part had caused his cousin's death, surely he might renounce the fruits of that death, he might make over the property to his next brother, at least. But no, he enjoyed the land without apparent remorse, and now he wished to take the lady as well. If he came to her, penitent and unhappy, she would gladly throw in her lot with his, loyally sharing the burden and the bitterness, and helping him retrieve the past.

Even now, there were moments when her heart so yearned over him that she felt that love must be paramount to everything—she must close her eyes on what she was not supposed to know, and make the best of what remained of his stained life, trusting him with the large generous trust he had asked of her, and evoking the better soul in the man who, as she knew, loved her deeply. As his wife he would perhaps confide in her, and she would help him make such atonement as was possible, loyally sharing his reproach. But then the horror of this secret rushed upon her soul, and she felt that to marry one to whom she imputed things so dark, would be to share in his sin: such a union could never be blessed of Heaven or bring any happiness to either

of them. She thought of children who would inherit a curse, and to whom she would fear to speak of their father's life. She saw darkness standing for ever between them, an impassable barrier; she saw the years passing on and making the confession harder and harder. She thought of Paul's desolate mother, childless in her lonely old age, bereft of the one son she had so passionately loved, and in him of all the joy of her widowed life. It would be treason to her to link her lot with Edward's. She had been much with Mrs. Annesley of late, and the desolate woman had grown very dear to Alice's filial heart. She never repeated her first accusation of her nephew to Alice, but her silence with regard to him was terribly eloquent. She clung to Alice and to no one else, and besought her not to leave her; she was the only comfort left her, she told her again and again.

After all, Edward had enough without her; he had youth, health, and friends, and the wealth and position that would in time attract more; for no doubt, as he said, he would live these slanders down. He might indeed have such pangs of conscience as would take the lustre out of the very sunlight. Yet when his face rose before her in all the reproach of its earnest honest love, as she had seen it in the garden that night, she could not attribute any wrong to him. Then recurred the old monotonous burden, why, why did he conceal anything? Surely if he sought her as his wife, he owed it to her to keep back nothing of his past; to demand

that large generous trust was an insult. No; with that reserve he could not love her truly and trustfully. The world's verdict was nothing if she could but strangle the serpent of doubt which gnawed so incessantly upon her heart.

She looked down into the quiet garden, where they had walked in the evening dews, when he told her the old tale that every woman loves to hear and yearns to respond to; she thought of his coming on that early spring day when she sat among her flowers and looked up and loved him, and felt that he loved her, before there was time to reflect; she knew that she must love him for ever and ever, and that without him she could know nothing of the joy and beauty of life. She could not give him up, she was too weak; it seemed as if her frail being must be rent asunder in the struggle.

So she thought, over and over again, praying for guidance, while the hours went on.

Presently she saw the pencil of rays which streamed from Gervase's chamber window, showing he was busy within, vanish, and she knew that all the house was asleep and silent as death. The tall eight-day clock ticked loudly in its oaken case in the hall, like a living pulse of family life; it chimed hour after hour in its friendly familiar voice; she remembered how she had listened to it in the silence of the first forlorn night she passed, a friendless child, beneath the roof which had since sheltered her so warmly. She thought of all their kindness, and the little she had ever been able to do

for them in return. She remembered Gervase's love, which he had so generously conquered; why could she not have loved him? She had taken Sibyl's lover from her, she had blighted Paul's life, she had brought she knew not what between the cousins, probably had been the cause of Paul's death; why had she been made the unwilling instrument of so much trouble? She would at least try to do well. She took counsel of the quiet night, the deep serene silence sank like balm into her soul; the pale pure stars spoke peace to her troubled breast. The shrouding moonshine slanted and glided gradually away from her window, leaving her in the soft shadows.

The flowers slept in the garden beneath; friendly Hubert slept his watchful dog-sleep at her door; the horses were quiet in their stalls, the rattle of a halter or the stamp of a hoof was too far off to be heard even through that throbbing silence; the cocks and hens were all still on their perches; the sheep and cattle grazed so quietly in the distant meadows, they scarcely seemed to move; a wind, which woke and sighed through the balmy foliage of the new-leaved trees, died away; the nightingale's song had ceased suddenly long ago; only the weird occasional creaking of furniture, the rustle of some night-creature through the grass, and the strange rhythmic long-drawn breathing which vibrates through solitary nights, like sleep's self made audible, emphasized the deep silence, while the scent of the dewy earth and drenched grass, the sweetness of the tall lilies, white

in the summer darkness, and all the fragrance of green and growing things filled it with balm.

Stars set, the moon had glided ghost-like away behind the dawn, a cock crew, a fresh breeze awoke, a pale greyness stole into the eastern sky and chilled the stars, and still Alice sat statue-like at the open lattice, resolute to wrestle once for all to the very death with the question which so tortured her; resolute also to decide once for all whether she ought to accept or refuse the only chance of happiness life offered her, whether it was her duty to give life-long pain or pleasure to one whose happiness was dearer to her than life.

Her face grew sharp and pinched in the grey pallor of the early dawn; for the inward struggle grew fiercer as the hours went on; the sweet deep silence which was so helpful to her would soon be broken by all the voices of the woods and fields; the sun would soon strike upon the earth and dissipate the friendly veil of darkness and lay her trouble bare; she must decide quickly. Doubt is the most dreadful torture the soul can endure, especially doubt of those we love; there were moments in that night of bitter conflict when it would have been comparative happiness to Alice to have her worst fears for Edward confirmed. In that case she saw herself in imagination at his side, in some vague way helping and healing him; a seductive vision. Had he come to her, suffering, needing her, she must have taken him.

Her mother's face floated before her. Scenes from childhood came back, casting strong lights and shadows on her father's unworthiness and her mother's misery. Her resolve was made; she would give Edward up. Then the conviction of his integrity darted arrow-like into her soul, and the struggle began once more. For if he were indeed guiltless she would be doing him a terrible injustice in refusing him. She had long ceased to think of the consequences to herself, she considered only what she owed to Heaven and the man who had placed his happiness in her hands.

Again the cock crew; the brooding greyness of the approaching dawn grew more intense; a bird stirred; a sort of grim ghastliness fell upon everything; the tall lilies shook on their stems, and were lost in the blurred shadow; a perceptible shudder passed over the earth, and many stars vanished from the sky.

Something cold touched the hand Alice laid on the window-ledge; it was the key of the vestry which was lent her that she might pass in and out of the church to play the organ. She took it up, and throwing a shawl over her head and shoulders, glided softly down the stairs, and, noiselessly sliding back the bolts of the garden-door, stole out into the grey garden. A lark shot up unseen into the dim sky, and broke the shadowy stillness with a thin strain of song; other birds woke, and filled the air with faint half-forlorn pipings and chirpings; there was a sort of trouble in the air and in their voices; they had not yet courage for full

song—they hoped for the cheerful sun-rising, but were by no means sure that it would truly come.

Every object was now distinct in the grey blankness which seemed but a mockery of life and light—distinct, and yet quite different to what it was in the familiar, comfortable light of day. The house looked ghostly with its blinded windows, it was so still and lifeless; every cottage had a deserted, death-like aspect; every chimney was smokeless; it was hard to believe that anything human was near, and yet the thought of well-known faces blind with sleep beneath those thatched eaves intensified the solitude.

She passed through the garden and meadow by the rick-yard, gathering her skirts about her to avoid the drenching dew, along behind the quiet cottages and the inn with its row of sycamores, till she reached another village, scarcely more silent than that beneath the thatched roofs below—the village of the dead, whose narrow homes clustered even more closely than the others about the hallowed walls of the ancient church. For these the sun would rise in vain, bringing no joy, nor any trouble or temptation, perplexity or strife.

A golden warmth stole into the grey world as she walked on, and when she passed through the churchyard wicket there was a great change. The square tower, with its wide buttresses, lost its hue of solemn grey, and all the hoary walls glowed rosy red; the sky was one rose, glowing most deeply on the horizon, and paling at the zenith; the last star faded in the universal

blush; the grass of the churchyard, the fields and woods, the stern grey ridge of down, the village with its smokeless chimneys, were all bathed in crimson radiance; the heart of nature was deeply stirred; the very leaves thrilled in the roselight, and the birds burst into full song.

She entered the silent, shadowy church; her light steps sent echoes rustling among the heavy arches and dark roof; by contrast with the external rosiness, it was night within; the pillars gleamed ghostly in the stillness; the marble Annesleys praying silently on their tombs were pale shadows in hearts of darkness.

The empty church always had a deep impressive charm for Alice; she had often been there before to pray and meditate. The solemn beauty of the ancient building, its sacred associations, the thought that for centuries those hoary walls and massive arches had heard nothing but holy music and words of prayer and praise, the solemn vows of life's most sacred moments, words of hope for the dead, and exhortation and comfort for the living; all these things lifted up her heart, dissipated the lower elements of life, and heightened the spiritual. Such light as there was in the church was gathered in the chancel beneath the east window, in which apostles and angels were beginning to live beneath the warm touches of the dawn. Here Alice knelt and poured out her soul in supplication, so that it seemed as if in comparison she had never prayed before.

Here she had knelt with Sibyl in their dawning womanhood at confirmation, and felt the majesty and meaning of a life linked with the divine. Here the heavenly symbols had been dealt to her and her adopted parents time after time; here the very air seemed to thrill with high resolve and holy aspiration, and the faces of the pictured angels, growing more distinct with the growing light over the altar, were full of encouragement and consolation.

Those untiring choristers, the swallows, made their sun-lit matins audible in the still, echoing aisles, bringing sweet associations of peaceful summer Sundays. All the angels and apostles in the east window were now distinct, their rich-hued raiment and aureoles glowed jewel-like in the sunshine, which sent long shafts of colour upwards into the chancel-roof and athwart the stone arches, touching one of the silent, praying Annesleys till his marble mail burned with warm radiance.

A vision of a marriage rose before her. The usual worshippers filled the empty church, the priest stood white-robed in the chancel, and uttered the solemn words, "I charge you both as ye shall answer at the great and dreadful day of judgment,"—the Annesleys were there, and the Rickmans, with the unseen witnesses of the spirit world, and listening, while she and Edward stood mute. The vision faded, the dead arose and thronged the air with spirit life; Paul Annesley, pale

and troubled from his last agony, gazed upon her and the secrets of all hearts were revealed.

When an hour had passed, she rose and left the church, her resolution strengthened by a vow, unheard by any human ears save her own, which tingled at the sound of her voice multiplied in muffled echoes through the silent church.

The sun had risen upon the earth when she came out into the fresh purity of the dewy morning; the faithful Hubert rose from his recumbent watch across the vestry threshold, and dropped quietly behind her with a look of unobtrusive sympathy which went to her heart; the village was still sleeping in the pure sunlight, though here and there labourers were faring forth, heavy-footed, to their work; the dew lay deep on the herbage, every blade of grass was so weighted and studded with jewels it seemed a marvel that it did not break; the wine-like air was filled with stimulating flower-scents. Alice passed swiftly on, lifted up in heart, touched by the beauty and purity of the sunny morning and comforted by the clear singing of the birds. She paused by Ellen Gale's grave and removed some faded flowers her own hands had laid there, and thought of the day when she sat by her bedside, and Edward's cheerful song came through the open lattice and stirred her so strangely. Was she wronging him, after all?

Though, once for all, she had decided not to accept his offered love, and with that decision peace had come, she felt that the terrible doubt would never be solved,

but would gnaw her heart continually, until the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. She remembered his words in the garden the night before, and realized that nothing would move him from his resolve to keep his secret, whether guilty or guiltless.

All was silent in Raysh Squire's cottage by the churchyard gate; no one had as yet stirred in the Golden Horse beneath, where the sunbeams were entangled in the tops of the sycamores; but in the meadow, where the sheep were lying down in expectation of a fair day, Daniel Pink was abroad tending his flock. The sight of the shepherd always brought spiritual strength to Alice; she knew more of his inward life than any other human being did, and revered the simple swain as she revered no other man. A little surprised to see her abroad so early, he looked up in answer to her greeting with something of the same feeling for her that she had for him. Alice's face was pale and transparent, and her eyes were full of unearthly fire, the shawl she had thrown about her was white; it seemed to the shepherd as if some pure spiritual presence were passing before him in the quiet morning.

She reached the garden-door unseen, though the carters were already busy with the horses, and John Nobbs was standing sturdy in the yard, with loud voice setting the men on to work, and stole unperceived through the still sleeping house and was soon in bed and asleep.

When she woke, it was to feel a kiss on her face, and to see Sibyl standing dressed by her side with the news that breakfast was over.

"Gervase sent these with his love," she added, pressing a bunch of freshly blown tea-roses to her burning cheek; "he was sorry to have to go to business without wishing you 'Good-morning.'"

CHAPTER V.

A VERDICT.

THE thick-moted sunbeams of a June mid-day fell broadly through the windows of Whewell and Rickman's offices, scorning the flimsy screen of the dingy white blinds, rejoicing the companies of flies buzzing drowsily in complex evolutions through the thick air, and making those clerks swear whose desks were not in the shadow; they poured in a broad stream of light into Gervase Rickman's private room, where he sat at his writing-table out of their range, and commanded a view of the busy street beneath.

Sheets of paper covered with figures lay before him; he had been at work for an hour and more solving complex arithmetical problems, deduced from various documents scattered here and there; the final result of his calculations was eminently satisfactory, though he looked pale and exhausted as well as relieved, like one just delivered from great peril.

"Of one thing I am quite resolved," he said to himself, lifting his face from the papers and leaning back in his chair, "never again will I speculate with other people's money—at least not in large sums—it is too risky."

Only two days before he had been appalled by the receipt of a telegram from a trusty hand in the East to the effect that the hitherto rapidly rising Chinese Chin-Luns in which he had largely invested were about to fall heavily, and an expression unintelligible to any but himself at the end of the despatch told him they would soon be worthless. He instantly telegraphed to his broker to sell the whole of his Chinese stock; next day he received a telegram to say that the sale was effected at a high though lowered price. Then he breathed freely, satisfied at having doubled his capital, in spite of all. And now the morning papers announced a fall in Chin-Luns heavy enough to have absorbed half his invested money; to-morrow's quotations he knew would be lower; he had only been just in time.

The Chin-Luns were not the only perilous stocks in which he had speculated; they serve as a specimen of the terribly exciting game Gervase Rickman was playing, a game as dependent on chance as any played over green cloth, and yet, like those, subject to certain laws, and capable of occasionally yielding satisfactory results to a player of iron nerve, and cool and steady brain. By constantly and closely watching commercial and political affairs; by dint of information which he managed to obtain from all sorts of unsuspected channels and which he never hesitated to act upon; by a keen insight into men and affairs which amounted to genius, together with a great capacity for calculating and combining, and educing order from chaos, and a

courage that nothing could daunt, this hard-headed young man, resolutely following the noble maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, had, in spite of many a hair-breadth escape from ruin, doubled and quadrupled his capital in the brief course of a few years. His face wore a triumphant expression as he sat at his writing-table and looked at the final result of the complicated network of investments which he was carrying on, suspected by few, and fully known to nobody.

A newspaper lay on the table; his eye caught the leading points of a criminal trial recorded in the uppermost columns, and he smiled an indulgent, half-pitying smile, such a smile as a skilful artist may accord to the failure of a beginner. "What a number of fools there are in the world," he thought, "unconscious fools, who blunder themselves into the grip of the law, thinking themselves capable!" He hastily glanced through the case, that of a lawyer who had speculated with trust-money and lost it, then he tossed the paper aside, and began pondering the question of re-investments for the Chin-Lun funds.

It really went to his heart to have to give such low interest to Alice Lingard after having doubled her money; but he could not give more than the interest legal for trust-money, and after all it would come to the same in the end; was it not all for her? He thought of others whose money had been the golden seed for his rich harvest, widows and orphans among

them; and quieted certain faint qualms of what still remained of his conscience by reflecting that all the strictest justice required of him was to return them their capital with fair interest. It is no doubt a fine thing, he considered, for lawyers to manage the affairs of incapables, and take care of their money for them; but then lawyers must live. He was a remarkably clever young man, and, as he frequently thought, it was really a great pity that talents so brilliant and a courage so magnificent were not employed in the direction of large national, even European affairs; a lawyer's office was too narrow a cell for capabilities like his, they could not expand and develop as they ought to.

"Soon," he reflected, "if I do not break—and I *will* not—I shall have enough."

This saying alone proved him to be a remarkable man. How often does one meet with a human being who knows a limit to his desire for wealth, especially one who has tasted the fierce rapture of gambling? But Gervase Rickman was no money worshipper; he desired wealth only as a stepping-stone to power; nor was he a slave to the passion of gambling, had he been so, he would never have kept the cool brain necessary to a winner.

"I do wonder, Rickman," said his new partner, Mr. Daish, one day, "that with your capacity for public life you are not more ambitious."

"Do you?" returned Rickman sweetly. "Well, it is no doubt a fine thing to be Mayor of Medington, but I

think Davis will make a better Mayor than I should." So Dr. Davis was elected to the municipal vacancy Mr. Daish wished his partner to fill, and Gervase Rickman saw him march to the parish church in a black silk gown trimmed with blue velvet behind the Mayor in scarlet and fur, and thought how funny Mr. Daish's notions of ambition were, Mr. Daish, who knew what an immense practice Whewell and Rickman's was, so immense that, in spite of the addition of one partner to the firm, they were about to give up the affairs of the Gledesworth estate. Yet the financial crisis, or rather crises, through which Gervase Rickman had just passed, coming as it did so shortly before that day of reckoning, Alice Lingard's twenty-first birthday, shook even his iron nerves, so that he rose to leave his office for luncheon at an unusually early hour, feeling an unwonted lassitude and distaste for work, and strolled quietly along the shady side of the streets till he came quite suddenly upon a rustic lane with a mill and bridge, under which a clear deep stream flowed tranquilly, shadowed by the green gloom of over-arching trees.

Here he rested, leaning on a rail and letting his thoughts wander at will with the quiet flow of the water, as thoughts will wander, borne peacefully upon a passing stream. The water made the sole barrier between the road and an orchard which sloped from a gentle rise down to the verge, grassy, cool and fresh, full of the quiet lights which fall at mid-day through

summer trees, and rest upon brown trunks and green grass.

But he could not find the mental repose he sought by the water-side; something which had passed between himself and Alice Lingard a day or two before came and troubled him, satisfactory as on the whole he considered it.

It was the day after Edward Annesley's visit to the Manor, and Gervase had ridden over in the evening, to look, he said, to the marking of the shorn sheep, but really to see how Alice, whom he had missed in the morning, was faring.

Of late Alice had drawn closer to him, completely set at rest by the perfect way in which he cloaked the true nature of his feelings towards her, and referring to him in every little doubt and difficulty as she did to no one else. Much as she loved her adopted father and mother, she relied little upon them; her nature was stronger than theirs, and she unconsciously regarded herself as a stay to them, and did not look to them for support. Sibyl was her companion and beloved sister, but a sister, however dear, is not a brother, which Gervase was and proved himself in a thousand unobtrusive ways.

He told Sibyl that he wanted to be alone with Alice that evening, and Sibyl, accustomed to confer privately with him herself, thought this perfectly natural; she therefore soon found an excuse for leaving them to the quiet stroll Gervase proposed, and he and Alice

walked on tranquilly alone together in the cool hush of the evening.

"What is it?" he asked quietly, when their desultory talk had come to an end, and they were resting half-way up the down against a gate.

Alice did not answer for a few minutes, but gazed on silently at the house and church lying beneath them in the last rays of evening.

"Wouldn't it be a relief to speak?" he continued, after a little. "You are pale and worn, you look as if you had had no sleep; something is worrying you."

"Yes," she replied, "you read me too well, Gervase; I *am* worried, but—no matter. It will pass."

He considered her thoughtfully for a little while, drawing his inferences. "A girl of your age," he continued, "ought to have no worries. Perhaps, after all, it is something that two words would set right."

"No," she replied, "nothing will ever set this right." Slow tears rose to her eyes, and fell on the rough wood of the gate on which her arms rested, and the tears went to his heart.

"Come, my dear child," he said, almost roughly, "this won't do. This is not like you, Alice."

"Oh, Gervase!" she cried, "you were always a good brother to me," and she turned to him and bent her head till her forehead touched his shoulder and rested there.

He summoned all his strength to resist the feelings

stirred by that light touch; to yield now to one impulse would be fatal, the impulse to fold the graceful burden stayed thus lightly upon him to his heart, and though he trembled slightly he did not move a muscle. It was but a moment that Alice leant against the strong arm, feeling an indescribable accession of moral support from the momentary contact, then she lifted her head, and the wild throbbing within him, of which she was so unconscious, quieted down, and Gervase's invincible will resumed its undisputed sway.

She looked up in his face with childlike confidence, and asked herself why she should bear a crushing burden alone, when she had so true and strong a friend to share it with her; Gervase answered her appealing look with a reassuring smile.

"I have no brother of my own," she continued, "and neither father nor mother to consult, and I have had to make a decision—and—I am not quite sure if I have done right."

She had done it, then; a weight was lifted off his heart, and he smiled more paternally than before.

"My dear child," he returned, "I have no doubt that you have acted wisely and well, but the wisest of us need a little friendly counsel at times."

"And besides the confidence I have in you," she added, "there is no one so fitted by circumstances to advise me upon this subject."

"No? That is a good thing."

"Gervase," she said, in the low tones of intense

feeling, "I was under the trees by the river that afternoon—I had been asleep. I overheard what you and Edward Annesley said."

Gervase was startled for a moment from his self-control; all the blood rushed to his heart and he gazed half-terrified upon her, wondering what she could have heard, and trying to recall the exact circumstances of their meeting, and the words of the conversation.

"I heard your promise," she continued, "and I will not ask you to break it, but I will ask you this. Because of what occurred that day, and for no other reason, I refused to-day to marry Edward Annesley. Was I right?"

He did not answer for awhile, all the sunny peaceful fields whirled before his eyes, his head throbbed. Had he known that she would put this terribly direct question to him he would never have risked being alone with her. He looked at her earnest face, worn by inward suffering and noble with pure and loyal feeling, and felt that never before had she been so dear to him as now, while she was thus guilelessly confiding to his ears her love for another man. In a dim way he realized the depth and beauty of that love, such a love as he could never hope to win. He knew that he held Alice's happiness in his hands, that the whole of her future life depended upon the next words he should say, and his heart was rent asunder with conflicting feelings. It would be sweet to make her happy, to see her face lighten and brighten and break into perfect

joy at his words: that would be better than any more selfish satisfaction that might come from making her his own.

"Oh, Alice!" he faltered, lifted above himself for a moment by the purifying passion of his love, oblivious of self, desiring nothing but the good of the guileless being whose moral beauty had so conquered him, "Alice!"

Yet he paused, true to his cautious character, before yielding to his higher nature and irrevocably changing the course of their lives, and the pause, as such pauses are, was fatal. All his life, with its aims, ambitions and strong purposes, flashed before him in a moment of time—for the Tempter exercises a strong necromancy over those who palter with their better impulses, and crushes a life-time of thought and feeling into a moment—he thought of the long years during which his heart had been wasting in patient love for Alice with a deep self-pity, and he shuddered to think how black and unbearable the future would be without her. Then the second strong feeling of his heart, his love for Sibyl, appealed to him along with more selfish passions; all her life, so closely bound up in his own, came before him from her babyhood till now, and that subtle something within us which twists everything to selfish ends and justifies our evil wishes, persuaded him that Sibyl's interests, rather than his own, were at stake. He recalled his sorrow when she lay as a child at the point of death, and they told him, she must die;

he remembered how he prayed, as he had never prayed before or since—prayer was a long disused habit with him;—how he nursed her, feeling as if his strong affection had wrested her from the jaws of death. He thought with tender pride of her beauty and talents, and he thought of her face the evening before, when she looked upon Edward in his trouble; Sibyl must be happy at any cost. So he resolved.

Alice interpreted his apparent agitation with a sinking heart, she scarcely now needed words to confirm her worst fears. "Was I right?" she repeated.

There was a singing in his ears, his lips were so dry that he could scarcely speak; he paused again, and at last said in a voice that sounded strange and harsh to both of them, "Quite right."

Alice made no reply, but the look in her face was one he never could forget, and the tones of his own voice rang hauntingly in the ears of his memory long after, lowly as they were spoken. "Quite right," echoed the harsh voice of the corncrake in the evening stillness. "Quite right," cawed the long string of rooks, proceeding solemnly homewards, dark specks against the pure sky. "Quite right," tingled the bells of the browsing sheep on the down above. "Quite right," murmured the rhythmic beat of his own heart, till the words, simple and few as they were, became meaningless by repetition, and yet more dreadful. To Alice, resting on the gate, with bowed head and averted face, they were the final knell of all that made life dear.

After some minutes of painful silence, Alice lifted her head, and the rose-light of the setting sun struck full upon the marble calm of her face, enhancing and still further spiritualizing its already spiritual beauty.

"Dear Gervase," she said, with the indescribable smile which comes from the depths of suffering, "you will never again refer to this."

"Never again," he murmured.

"Shall we go just to the crest of the hill?" she added; and they strolled tranquilly on, occasionally talking upon homely trivial subjects.

As this scene recurred to Gervase in the noonday shadows by the cool stream, with Alice's sorrow-stricken face seeming to gaze from the water's green depths, and his own words, "Quite right," ringing through the chambers of his memory, he felt that it had shaken him even more than the anxiety of the last few days, severe as that had been. Had he not escaped that danger, he would have had an agreeable birthday present to give Alice in the shape of a blank cheque representing the whole of her fortune, together with the appearance of his own name in the gazette; but he was too well used to narrow escapes and too sane of mind to dwell upon a past danger. The thought of the suffering he had inflicted upon her was another thing; it haunted him and refused to set him free; it came between him and his work; it spoilt his splendid nerve and daunted his magnificent audacity.

When the vision of Alice's sorrowful face became

too insistent, he summoned another, that of Sibyl in the garden, gazing upon Edward's gloom. If he remembered too keenly the light pressure of Alice's brow on his shoulder when she sought counsel and comfort of him, he recalled the evening, more than a year ago, of Reginald Annesley's funeral, and pictured the sweet face of Sibyl wet with tears, when he asked what ailed her, knowing only too well, and she replied that his music was too mournful. Dear little Sibyl! How was it possible to see her and not love her?

There was little comfort to be got out of the green coolness by the mill-stream that day, and after a brief pause there, he turned, and retracing his steps through the lane, emerged into the broad sunshine and comparative bustle of the High Street, down the shadiest side of which he passed slowly till he came to Mrs. Annesley's house, shrouded in its cool green veil of Virginia creeper, and presenting a refreshing contrast to the baked red bricks and glaring stucco of the houses on either side of it.

Here he crossed over into the sunshine, just as the door opened, and the well-known figure of the Vicar of Medington issued from it and paused at the foot of the steps.

"Are you going in, Mr. Rickman?" the doctor asked, while the servant waited, holding the door open. "You will find dear Mrs. Annesley brave and patient as usual. Such a truly religious woman! When one thinks what she has gone through, one can but wonder and admire."

"Yes," returned Gervase, "she has gone through a good deal, poor woman!"

"She forgets her own trouble in the sorrows of others," continued the doctor. "I did but mention the case of that poor Jones who was killed by the breaking of a crane on the quay last week, leaving a widow and seven children—these poor fellows invariably leave seven children, in obedience, I suppose, to some occult law—and she immediately gave me a cheque for twenty pounds, and bid me get up a subscription to make a fund for them; so I suppose I must," he added, with an ingenuous sigh; "but I should not, I confess, have done it without her generous example. Warm, is it not?"

"Stay, doctor," replied Gervase, detaining him while he fished a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, "let me add my mite. I am a poor man, though I have not as yet emulated poor Jones in giving seven hostages to fortune, or it should be more. I hope you will let the firm add further to your list."

"Charming young man," reflected the doctor, going off with his booty. "What a pity his politics are so pronounced!"

"Hang the old fellow!" muttered Gervase, going up the steps. "That was a cunning way of begging. These parsons are up to every dodge under the sun to get at one's pockets."

He turned as he entered the house, and nodded to a shabby old countryman, half-farmer, half-labourer, who was slouching by on the other side of the street, and

thought what a narrow escape that old man had just had from ending his days in the workhouse, since his savings would have vanished along with Alice Lingard's inheritance, had the crisis he had just successfully passed proved fatal.

CHAPTER VI.

PREDICTIONS.

MRS. ANNESLEY, more majestic than ever in her heavy crape draperies in the cool gloom of her solitary room, received her guest with mournful benignity.

"How good of you to come to a poor lonely old woman!" she said. "You know how it cheers me when you drop in to share my solitary meal."

"A miserable bachelor is only too glad to get"—he was just going to say "a first-rate luncheon," but happily pulled himself up in time to substitute "congenial society, above all ladies' society, with his meals."

"Oh, you have no lack of ladies' society!" she said, with a pleased smile. "When were you last at Arden, and how did you find them all?"

"Perfectly well, thank you, and the roses coming well into bloom. They talked of sending you some in a day or two. I can spare less and less time for home now."

"So busy?" You were right about a certain document, Gervase. I have had it drawn up and duly signed and witnessed, and there it is for your perusal." And she took out a paper that he knew to be her will.

"Thank you," he replied, smiling. "I need not see it. If it was drawn up by Pergament, as I advised, it is sure to be in order."

"You don't care, then, to know what a lonely old woman designs for you after her death?" she returned, reproachfully.

"I can't endure to think of such a contingency," he said, earnestly. "Poor as I am, I shall regret the much-needed money that comes to me from that source."

"Gervase," said Mrs. Annesley, with apparent irrelevance, "what is this I hear of Edward Annesley's discredit with his brother officers? Is it true that in consequence of certain scandals he will have to leave the service?"

"It is true that he has been advised to do so, but he has not been officially recommended to resign," replied Gervase.

Mrs. Annesley looked disappointed, and knitted her stern brows in silent thought.

"I cannot imagine," pursued Gervase, "how these rumours get about." And he looked searchingly from under his downcast eyelids at the severe face, which broke into a celestial smile before his furtive gaze.

"No," she returned sweetly, "nor can I. But I believe in a just Heaven, Gervase; and I know that retribution, sooner or later, always overtakes the guilty."

"Ah!" he murmured, with dubious meaning. He was thinking of the letter his quick eye had perceived on the writing-table when he came in. It was a thick

letter, addressed to Mrs. Markham. Mrs. Markham, he knew, was not only an old and intimate friend of Mrs. Annesley's, but she was also the mother-in-law of Colonel Disney, Edward Annesley's commanding officer. That accounted for a good deal. Gervase Rickman possessed some imagination; he readily pictured Mrs. Annesley detailing the circumstances of her son's death and her own conjectures respecting it in long and confidential recitals to Mrs. Markham, whose sympathy with her bereaved friend would no doubt be profound, and concluding every confidence with the strictest injunctions to secrecy. He imagined Mrs. Markham burdened with the weight of so delightfully scandalous a secret, recounting it in a moment of expansion, under vows of strictest secrecy, and by no means to the diminution of the scandal, to her daughter, Mrs. Disney. He could see the two ladies gloating over the narrative; the shaken heads, the exclamations, the up-lifted hands, the repeated injunction, "My dear, above all, never breathe a syllable to your husband," sequent upon which injunction he of course saw Mrs. Disney burning for a moment of conjugal confidence, when she would transfer the whole of the recital to the bosom of the Colonel, with the same solemn injunctions to secrecy. Then in his mind's eye he saw this officer looking askance at Edward, and unconsciously treating him with less cordiality than usual. One day, perhaps, Colonel Disney would say to some one, "Wasn't there something rather queer about Paul Annesley's death? Does anybody

remember the newspaper reports?" That officer would say to another, "There was something very fishy about Paul Annesley's death. It happened abroad, and was kept out of the English papers, you know—hushed up. It was unlucky for our Annesley that he was on the spot," he might add.

"It was precious lucky for Annesley that his cousin got himself pushed over the precipice," perhaps his audience would say on a subsequent occasion.

"And what had Ned Annesley to do with it?" another hearer might say; "it is to be hoped he didn't push him overboard. It must be awfully tempting to a man's next heir to find himself just behind him at the edge of a *crevasse*. An accidental push, and down the fellow goes, and you get the estate. Shocking accident, papers say; young man of immense property; all goes to a distant cousin."

"It wasn't a *crevasse*, Smith," another man would object, "it was on a cliff by some river in France. Perhaps the Annesleys were larking and one pushed the other over. It was unlucky for our man that the rich one went overboard. He doesn't look like a fellow with something on his conscience."

"He does look like a fellow with a guilty secret."

"And how did they get it hushed up?"

"Easy enough on the Continent. Bribe the officials."

"There was an account of it in the *Times*, if you remember, last autumn. Struck me at the time as a precious queer story. I must say that Annesley has

never been the same man since. He wasn't a bad lot before."

"Oh! it is only because he is rich."

"My dear fellow, money never spoils a man's temper or makes him look as if he had baked his grandfather. It's the want of it makes a fellow swear and cut up rough. It's a bad conscience with Annesley, that's why he looks so glum."

"It's the family ghost. They say every Annesley who comes into the property is haunted, and either goes mad or hangs himself."

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the story. It isn't a ghost, it's a curse; every Annesley who gets Gledesworth comes to grief. Reginald Annesley of the Hussars was killed elephant-hunting—or pig-sticking, wasn't it? his father went mad and died. Paul Annesley took this unlucky step over the cliff, and goodness knows what will happen to Ned Annesley; anyway, he's in for a bad thing."

All this Gervase Rickman imagined, and much more, hitting, with the instinct of creative genius, the core of the literal truth. He saw files of last autumn's papers consulted and discussed, and guessed the position his own name would occupy in the general gossip, when disinterred from the brief narrative. He understood, further, much that had hitherto been dark to him respecting the spread of rumour in that part of the world, fitting little bits of information together, and supplying the gap with clever inductions till he had a fair chain

of evidence. He remembered an observation of the Vicar's to the effect that Mrs. Annesley was a deeply wronged woman and knew how to forgive, and this observation was suggestive.

"I conclude," continued Mrs. Annesley, ignorant of what was passing through the mind of the thoughtful and clever young man before her, "that Edward Annesley has sent in his papers."

"Not at all," returned Rickman, with a subtle inflection of triumph in his accent; "he means to live it down, he says."

"It is the first time, Mr. Rickman," she replied, with an angry glitter in her eye, "that an Annesley has preferred his convenience to his honour. There are people who are beneath scorn. Pardon me, I forgot that I was speaking of your *friend*."

"Of my father's friend, and landlord, and my employer," he returned tranquilly.

"And Alice Lingard's lover," she added, with a glance of disdainful anger.

"Her rejected suitor," he corrected, with a curious smile.

"Rejected? Are you certain?" she asked eagerly.

"Perfectly. We need fear no more from that quarter. He was sent off for good and all, three days ago."

"Heaven is just," observed Mrs. Annesley with pious fervour.

"Exactly," replied Gervase absently. He was think-

ing what a clever woman Mrs. Annesley was; it seemed almost a pity she had not come into the world thirty years later, such a woman would indeed be a help-mate for him. He was not sure that she had not been a little too clever for him; he had not intended the Annesley scandal to go so far, and his fertile brain was not yet prepared with a scheme for checking it.

"You probably have not fully considered the risk you run in being associated with that man," she continued.

"And what if I had?" he replied; "a poor man with bread to earn cannot be so over-nice. Besides, as you know, we give up the stewardship on quarter-day."

"And still receive him at your house."

"Pardon me. My father still receives him at his house," he corrected, sighing a little, for he felt that he had a difficult and delicate part to play, in preserving friendly relations with both this stern and resolute woman and the man she hated so bitterly. He thought too with some apprehension of the extreme difficulty of managing with such dexterity as to separate Edward from Alice, and at the same time throw him into Sibyl's society; he was beginning to fear, besides, that Edward's reputation was almost too seriously damaged for Sibyl's marriage with him to be a success. He looked at the rigid lips of the hard woman sitting opposite him, and suspected that his iron will and subtle brain had been matched, if not over-matched, and mentally endorsed

the truth of Raysh Squire's verdict upon Mrs. Annesley, "You can't nohow get upzides with she." But it was important that he should "get upsides with" Mrs. Annesley, and he determined to do so, not knowing the extent to which she was turning him inside out.

Luncheon was announced while his mind was occupied with these reflections, and the conversation was interrupted—not disagreeably to this unfortunate and deeply perplexed child of genius—for he was fagged and hungry, and always knew how to appreciate an excellent meal, daintily set off with rich and tasteful appointments; nor did he fail to appreciate the state Mrs. Annesley affected since her son's death. This event had given her an income quite out of proportion to the house in the street of a country town, which she chose to occupy, nevertheless, since it was her own, and since her position, spite of its woful diminution now that she was no longer the mother of the unmarried Annesley of Gledesworth, was still good enough to enable her to live on in Medington without loss of consideration. Gervase had always felt that he was born for a more brilliant sphere than that he occupied; Mrs. Annesley's complicated cookery, with Frenchified names, was only a suitable tribute to a man so evidently intended by nature for a lofty destiny, and he listened to Mrs. Annesley's long grace with the inward reflection that the meal justified it, and complacently refreshed his inner man to the accompaniment of his hostess's

elegant small talk, glad to be excused the more difficult topics the servant's presence had put aside.

He was sorry when they were alone again, and Mrs. Annesley returned to the charge.

"I could never understand," she said, "how you could bring yourself to act with or under that man, after what you saw in the Jura. You have assured me so many times that what you then actually witnessed is insufficient evidence to base a trial upon."

"Dear Mrs. Annesley, need I assure you again? Why revive a topic that must be so especially painful to you?"

"My young friend, do you suppose that topic is ever absent from my mind?" she returned in a deep voice, with a keen cold glance.

"I suppose," reflected the unfortunate young man, "that you are an awful old woman, and that I had better, after all, have had nothing to do with you." But, aloud, he said something about a mother's bereavement being perpetual, at which Mrs. Annesley applied her handkerchief daintily to each side of her nose, and murmured that his sympathy was one of the few solaces left to a forlorn widow.

"You told him," she added, replacing the handkerchief in her pocket with a prompt return to her business-like manner, "that your business had become too large and important to make it worth your while to conduct his affairs?"

"Yes, and it was true; we can do very well without the Gledesworth affairs. I had thought of giving it to Daish, but he has enough to do without. Daish is a very fair man of business; wholesomely dense in a way, but understands when directed; the very man to be under a master."

"My dear Gervase, you take a new partner, and refuse important business, and have branch offices in half-a-dozen towns; that all hangs excellently together, and Edward Annesley might believe you, if he were less of a fool than he is. But what does not fit is the fact that you are constantly bewailing your poverty."

Gervase explained that poverty is a relative term, and depends upon the relation of a man's needs to his possessions. "The fact is," he said in conclusion, "I want money—a great deal of money. No one suspects what my aims really are, but your friendship, dear Mrs. Annesley, has always been so perfect, and you have so much sympathy with whatever soars above the common, that I feel moved to confide in you, the more so as your influence is great, and may materially aid me."

He spoke with a hesitating, almost timid air, like a man who longs to make a confidence but needs some encouragement to bring him to the point. Mrs. Annesley's piercing gaze was directed upon his down-cast intellectual face; she was wondering to what extent he was lying, as indeed she usually did while conferring with him.

"My influence," she echoed, with a melancholy accent, "what influence can a forlorn and childless widow such as I am have? Do not mock my affliction, dear Gervase. *I* am not the mother of Annesley of Gledesworth," and the handkerchief once more appeared, and was again daintily pressed to each side of Mrs. Annesley's finely formed nose.

"Nevertheless," returned Gervase, who knew exactly what she wanted him to say, "you have far more influence than the lady who occupies that position. Influence depends more than is commonly supposed upon force of character. I don't think you quite know the extent to which Mrs. Annesley of Medington is looked up to, and the great sympathy which her sorrows inspire."

She knew that he was fibbing and yet she liked it; flattery is so essential to some natures that they are almost indifferent to its truth or falsehood so long as incense of some kind is offered them. She therefore replied that, though conscious of her own impotence, she was most willing to further her dear friend's views as far as she could, and begged him, if it would be the slightest solace to him, to confide his aims to her motherly breast. And Gervase, knowing that her genius for intrigue gave her an influence more potent in the furtherance of his purposes than that of rank or wealth, and being unusually expansive on account of the wine he had taken to quiet his troubled mind, replied,

"I am ambitious. I do not intend to remain an attorney in a country town long."

"Your talents are wasted in such a sphere," she replied; "there is no doubt of that. But to what do you mean to rise?"

His ambition had always inspired her with admiration, and the thought that she might bring a brilliant young man into public notice was most pleasing to her, possessing the instinct of patronage to such an unusual degree as she did.

"I intend," he replied, gazing with a pre-occupied air straight before him, "to rule England, if not Europe."

The quiet matter-of-fact air with which he uttered this large resolve startled Mrs. Annesley, and her eyes flashed with unfeigned admiration.

"You aim high," she replied almost breathlessly.

"Why not?" he returned coolly; "with a resolute purpose, a high aim is as easily achieved as a low one."

Mrs. Annesley was too startled to be amused at the idea of a young country lawyer purposing to govern his country, if not the world at large, in this off-hand manner; she saw no bathos in his observations, perhaps in her momentary bewilderment she had a vague notion that Gervase might send her straightway to the Tower if she incurred his displeasure; she could only ask him, with unusual meekness, how he meant to begin.

"First, I must get money," he replied; "then I must get a seat in Parliament. The rest," he added, smiling

with a sudden consciousness of the ridiculous side of his pretensions, "will follow."

Yet though he had too wholesome a sense of humour not to be amused at his large assertion, he fully meant it, and Mrs. Annesley, looking silently and thoughtfully upon his resolute countenance, which was now more than usually alight with intellect, and pondering upon the oratorical gifts he was known to possess, upon his strength of will, his industry, his learning, his genius for affairs, and his knowledge of human character, realized all at once that a born statesman was sitting at her table, and that, though, friendless and unknown as he was, he might never rule England, much less Europe, to do which, he would have, as he afterwards informed her, to transform England to a great extent, he would probably rise to a creditable position in public life. Ruling England might be but a vaunt, yet not wholly an idle one; it was like the marshal's bâton in the knapsack of the republican soldier, or the woolsack in the future of the young barrister, a symbol and aim of the ambition without which men never rise above mediocrity.

She knew him to be unscrupulous, and this in her eyes was a further guarantee of his success. She did not believe with Alice Lingard, that honour and honesty are the only permanent bases of political as of personal greatness, and that, though an ambitious and unscrupulous genius may achieve the highest eminence, such a one is almost certain to fall.

"Come into the garden," she said when she had recovered from her surprise, "and tell me all about it." And they went out and strolled in the shade of the lime-trees for a sunny half-hour, while Gervase unfolded the details of his immediate plans and spoke of the probability of the borough of Medington falling vacant at no distant date, and of the desirability of his finances being in a condition for him to contest it. Then Mrs. Annesley promised him definite financial as well as personal aid, and he knew that neither was to be despised. And although he did not impart his ambitious plans as yet to any one else, he knew that the same occult powers which had affixed a stigma to Edward Annesley, could associate his name with a predicted success which might fulfil itself. He was also aware that Mrs. Annesley had latterly renewed her acquaintance with her aristocratic connections, some of whom were distinguished both in the world of society and in that of politics.

He returned to his office in high spirits; he knew that Mrs. Annesley was far too dangerous as a possible foe, not to be made a certain friend, and in confiding in her and throwing himself upon her, he had secured her on his side for life; he would now be in some sort her own creation, so he had persuaded her.

The very danger of the crisis through which he had just passed increased his confidence in that vague something which he named his destiny. All men are illogical, especially those who make a point of being logical and following nothing but the light of reason,

and who think to conquer circumstance by their own unaided will. Gervase, therefore, who regarded religion as the malady of undeveloped minds, and professed to be able to mould his own fate and that of others by the sole power of his purpose, was a firm believer in his lucky destiny, and was constantly tormenting himself with fears lest that capricious divinity should one day veer round and persecute him, as it had hitherto favoured him.

Having seated himself at his desk that afternoon, and being much occupied with thoughts of his continued good luck, he determined to consult an oracle in which he believed as fervently as any girl believes in the saints she calls upon by the wayside cross. He opened a penknife with a long fine blade, and poised it carefully in his hand with the point directed to the wall opposite him. While doing this, his confidential clerk knocked at the door; but he did not answer, he continued gazing with an intent anxious gaze upon a spot of colour in the pattern of the wall-paper. The clerk then made the preconcerted signal denoting urgency in a series of taps on the door; still no reply, Gervase's hand trembled slightly and his face was pale; he shot the knife dart-like at the spot on the wall, and instantly got up and followed it, and smiled with relief when he found the blade quivering in the very centre of the pattern.

Three times the rite was performed, each time with increasing trepidation; while the clerk, who heard his footsteps, coughed an impatient cough and repeated

that signal of urgency. When the blade quivered the third time in the same spot, the tension of the young man's features relaxed, he took the knife and shut it with a tranquil air, saying inwardly that he was now sure of success, and resuming his seat, he bid the clerk enter in his usual manner. It was a favourite axiom of his that all men are fools in some respects.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIRE OF GLEDESWORTH.

WHEN Edward Annesley reached home at the end of his moonlight ride after the discouraging reception of his suit by Alice, he went to bed and to sleep in the most unromantic fashion, and rose refreshed next morning to eat a hearty breakfast.

After breakfast, he took a cigar and went round the stables, and listened to an account of the symptoms of his sister's riding-horse, and, having attentively examined the creature, prescribed for it; then he carefully felt the legs of a carriage-horse, and decided that there was nothing the matter but swelling from insufficient exercise, and considered other important stable matters, smoking with apparent enjoyment all the time.

Then he passed an hour in his mother's sitting-room, discussing matters of business, looking over the accounts of one of his brothers, who was not yet able to stand on his own foundation, but making no allusion to what had occurred at Arden the day before, beyond saying that he had passed the evening at the Manor.

After this he strolled through the park down to a little cove, surrounded by tall forest trees, growing

right down to the water's edge, where there was a tiny pier and bathing-stage and a boat-house, and, stepping into a little boat, sculled out seawards. Then his face became thoughtful, and he began to reflect on what had passed in the garden the evening before.

Alice was friendly towards him, and more than kind, as became her nature; but she did not love him, and he did not think he could ever win her love. Paul's untimely fate had surrounded him with a halo of tenderness; there was a pathos in his sudden death which, Edward decided, would make Alice cling to his memory as to that of a canonized saint.

Yet the fact that Alice besought him to tell the secret of his part in that death, showed that she entertained at least some thought of accepting his proposals, though the fact that she did not trust him indicated conclusively that she did not, and probably never would love him. A love without trust could not be based upon the reverent perception of moral beauty, which was the foundation of his own love. And it was not so very unreasonable that she should wish him to explain the history of that afternoon; he saw clearly that whether she would finally grow to love him or not, she would most certainly never accept his addresses until the mystery was cleared up. That would be the first step.

As he sculled swiftly over the calm waters, the blue heaven above him and the blue sea beneath, Alice's face rose before him, and the tones of her voice grew

upon his ear, and he felt how deeply he loved her and how impossible it was to be happy without her. If he could not win her, he would make no unmanly moan, but the glory of his life would be gone. After the keenness of the disappointment had worn off, he might even find some good, loveable woman to whom he would be a good husband, and who would be a contented wife; but he would never be really happy, he would have missed the best things in life; he even doubted if he could so far conquer his feelings as to marry. As he thought this, seeing Alice's face in imagination and recalling the charm of her presence, tears rose to his eyes, and dimmed the blue vision of sea and sky before him, and it came into his mind that it would be worth doing anything to win her. Should he yield to her wishes and tell her all, taking the risk of what might follow?

So he pondered for a long time, sculling more and more rapidly in the stress of this suggestion, oblivious of the hot sunshine, until the perspiration streamed from his face, while the green shore lessened in the distance, and he was near being run down by a yacht steaming along at high speed.

After all, he had a right to win her; there was no justice in frustrating the happiness of his life because Paul Annesley could have no more earthly enjoyment, and was it not a happier fate for Alice to love a living man than a dead one? He called up a vision of Alice wooed and won, living a tranquil and useful life by his

side. He thought how happy he would make her, surrounding her with tenderest love, and protecting her from every trouble; honour and peace would wait upon her steps in the home he would give her, and a thousand sweet domestic joys would spring up and blossom in her path. But all this only if she loved him; yet why should she not? The picture was so sweet that he dwelt upon it long, so long that at last it was beginning to confuse his sense of right. He imagined himself telling her the whole story, and tried to think how she would bear it. He thought he saw horror coming into her eyes as she listened, and anguish clouding her face,—and would that be all? No; if he judged her rightly, something more would come between them—anger and scorn. She would never forgive him, as he could never forgive himself.

Then the current of his thoughts turned; he saw a pitying tenderness stealing into her face, and found himself forgiven for his love's sake, and perhaps, when the anguish had spent itself, loved at last. At this thought the temptation to tell all became urgent. It was so hard to let her go without further efforts to win her. But she did not trust him; *could* she ever love him? What strange infatuation his had been, when first he saw and loved her and thought—preposterous thought—that his love was returned. It must have been pure imagination, because after he knew of Paul's claims she had seemed so different and so distant; doubtless she had never been anything but distant, only

his wishes had made him fancy that she inclined to him. Those few bright days at Arden were but days stolen from a fool's paradise, the only paradise, he thought with unwonted bitterness, men ever enjoy in this perverted and perverse earth.

It was pleasant, nevertheless, to remember the brief fool's paradise, which seemed so long and so full of events. He recalled their discussions and arguments upon every conceivable topic, and all the hints of character brought out by trivial events. Once they were talking of "Vanity Fair," and especially of that matchless creature, Becky Sharp, and Alice said that had she been Amelia, she could have forgiven Becky everything but that one crowning injury of revealing George Osborne's infidelity. "It was like killing a soul," she said, "for she destroyed the ideal of a lifetime."

The air seemed still to vibrate with the tones of her voice; he remembered the flutter of a ribbon on her dress when she spoke.

No more fool's paradises for Edward Annesley, only the stern facts of life and stout wrestling with circumstances remained for him, as perhaps was fitting for a tough fellow able to take his full share of hard knocks.

"I will never tell her," he said aloud, though no one heard but the waves and the sea-birds skimming above them, and the light breeze which sprang up and invited him to step his tiny mast and hoist his sail, and

flit over the waters in emulation of the gulls. While he sped before the wind, pursuing these reflections, he thought that the best thing in most lives might after all be a happy memory of an untarnished ideal.

The sun had turned, and was already far down the western slope, when the woods and meadows around Gledesworth came in sight again, and he sculled into the cove, put the little boat's head straight for the landing-place, and sprang out the moment the keel ground the shingle. The serene calm which follows on a temptation resisted filled his heart, though he was too little given to introspection to know why he was at peace. As he turned to haul the boat up the shore, an idea struck him, and he saw the exact spot where the coast defences should be strengthened, the weak spot that the enemy would not fail to detect and take advantage of; but it seemed so strange that neither he nor those who planned the fortifications should have seen it before.

Musing of guns, ships, and forts, he strolled along the sunny turf, seeing his chimneys and gables rise above the green domes of woodland encircling them, seeing the downs stretching away beyond the park, until he passed into the golden green shadows of a beech grove and came out in the full blaze of the afternoon sunshine upon the open park-land in front of the house, which stood on a rising ground. It was a fine old Jacobean building in grey stone, built on to an older wing, which extended far back, and was scarcely

seen from this approach, and behind which was a beautifully timbered Gothic hall, in good preservation. It was a noble specimen of a stately English home; the park was full of magnificent trees, the growth of ages; all along by the sea, beneath the down-ridge and beyond it for miles, spread well-cultivated fields, interspersed with farms and woods; a goodly inheritance.

Edward Annesley looked at it and wondered if any one could be a whit the better for possessing it, as he did; the bare-armed and brown-faced gardener, pushing his mowing-machine with a pleasant sound over the smooth deep sward, had as good a harvest for his eyes. The tops of the oaks caught the full sunshine in their russet and green leafage against the lucid sky, and moved as pleasantly in the breeze for the gardener as for his master: the blue haze veiled the distance as sweetly and the sunlight lay as warmly for him on the weathered stone of the broad and picturesque house-front.

Edward had been much happier in the old days, when he was but a subaltern officer of artillery with a moderate income and few responsibilities, with no pretensions, but with endless possibilities before him in the profession he loved, if not exactly with a field-marshal's bâton in his pocket, before his meeting with Alice Lingard had created an imperious need in his heart. All he wanted then was a fair chance in the service, the variety and possible travel and peril of a military life, his books and instruments, and leisure to use them,

with the companionship of men of similar tastes. Truly, he reflected, "man wants but little," but by some strange perversity of fate that little is usually the unattainable; Sappho's apple reddening out of reach on the orchard's topmost bough. Even Paul, who so well appreciated wealth and the consideration which accompanies it, had found it worthless without Alice to share his possessions and give the crowning grace to his beautiful home.

Mrs. Edward Annesley was sitting at a table beneath a spreading plane-tree in front of the house, and at some distance from it, with some needlework in her hand. She saw her son issue from the beechen grove and come towards her in the sunshine. Some echo of his musings was in her mind at the moment; she too was beginning to realize the vanity of the good fortune which had so unexpectedly befallen them, though perhaps she would not have done so but for the blighting suspicions which gathered round her son and deprived the whole family in some measure of the social standing their inheritance should have given them. The great house seemed to her, as to Edward, unhomelike, and like him, she thought regretfully of the plain, unpretentious red-brick house mantled with ivy, in which her husband had died, and her latter years had been spent in peace and pleasantness.

The reproach weighed on her, but not as it weighed upon Annesley himself. As her son drew nearer, her heart went out to him. It seemed as if Time had

rolled backwards in its course, and not her son but her husband, as she knew him in the fulness of his strength, was coming to her side again.

"Dear child!" she murmured within herself, while her kind eyes clouded, "I never thought him so like his father till of late."

What was the change that every one noticed in him? she wondered, as she watched the well-knit figure, carelessly clad in a light morning suit, moving with firm even tread over the grass. Perhaps his step was too measured, and lacked its former lightness; certainly the dark eyes, shadowed by the straw hat, had lost their youthful joyousness, and looked out upon the world sternly, almost defiantly; and that made him like his father, who had had many a fall in his rounds with Fortune. There was the stamp of ineffaceable trouble on his face; what could it be? Children, she reflected, must always be changing through all the stages of childhood to youth, and then from youth to manhood, and what manhood passes unscathed by trouble and care? Annesley of Gledesworth—she was proud of the title in her fond way, and thought he became it well; he looked like a man to sit in high places, and be clothed with power and responsibility.

"All alone, mother?" he asked, taking a seat near her, and losing half-a-dozen years from his face as he spoke. "Has any one been or anything happened? I meant to have been in for luncheon, but the wind was fair for a sail."

"And you have been rowing, I see, by your blistered hands. How brown your hands have become! No, nothing has happened, and nobody has driven or ridden out."

"I have just thought of selling Gledesworth," said Edward, abruptly.

"My dear child, selling a property that has been in the family since King John's time!"

"Yes, selling it, curse and all. I don't care for the place, do you?" He looked up and laughed. "It gives me the creeps, and makes me fool enough to believe in the prediction. Upon my word, I wonder nobody ever thought of selling the curse before."

"There might be a difficulty in finding a purchaser, Ned. Oh, my dear," she added, more seriously, "if you could but clear yourself of these suspicions! That is what poisons the place for you—that is our curse."

"I wish I could, for your sake," he replied; "but really you take it too much to heart. What is a little ill-natured gossip after all? Words are but air."

"Oh, that woman!" she exclaimed. "She was the bane of your life long before you were born or thought of. She trifled with your dear father till she nearly wore him out, and no sooner were we engaged than she did all she could to make mischief between us. Not that I believe he ever really cared for her," she added, with asperity, "but most men can be made fools of by artful and unscrupulous women."

"My dear mother," he replied, with some amuse-

ment, "that is an old story to rake up. And you must admit that Aunt Eleanor got the worst of it in marrying my Uncle Walter instead of my father."

"There is comfort in that, Ned," she admitted. "If she would but let you alone! It is she who slanders you, and no other. I could tell you stories of the vindictiveness of those Mowbrays that would make your hair stand on end."

"Poor soul!" he said, "think of her trouble. I firmly believe it has turned her brain. She is not responsible for what she does. I said so at the very first, if you remember."

"If she is mad, her temper has made her so, and she ought to be shut up," replied Mrs. Annesley, with curious logic but firm determination. "My dear," she added, with apparent irrelevance, "I quite believe in you, but it would make me happier if you would tell me the whole story of that miserable business."

"My dear mother," he replied, his face hardening as he spoke until he seemed no longer her son Edward, "you promised me not to re-open that question. We have discussed it too much already."

She looked him in the face, her heart beat, and a dreadful doubt sickened her. She had known this man from his cradle; he had told her all his thoughts and confessed all his errors and follies from the first stammer of infancy till now; could she doubt him? He had never to her knowledge lied since he was old enough to know the meaning of truth, he had even, in

his cadet days, told her many of his scrapes. She had tried not to spoil him and turn him into the flabby sinner or saint a widow's eldest son so often proves; she thought that she had never suffered him to rule her, and certainly had not let him play the tyrant to the younger children; she had had very little trouble with him, but she knew that mothers and wives seldom hear the whole history of sons and husbands.

"It is hard not to know. I am your mother!" she exclaimed.

"It is hard not to be trusted, and I am your son," he replied more gently; and then a servant appeared with tea-cups, and they could not pursue the subject. Harriet Annesley's singing came faintly from an open window,

"Ach Gott, mein Lieb ist todt,
Ist bei dem lieben Gott,"

and made him think of Alice and Paul.

It broke off abruptly, and Harriet appeared at the top of the steps, down which she floated with a child-like grace, and joined her elder sister, Eleanor, who was now a fine young woman, and the two came to the plane-tree and scolded their brother for going off all day without telling any one.

Then Eleanor poured out tea, and they were all very merry in a homely way. Edward thought how pretty and charming they were, and what a pity it was that the doors of society should be shut upon them just in the golden promise of their lives; and while he was

thinking this and affectionately teasing them, he became aware of a sturdy little figure, with a dogged yet blushing face, striding with long heavy steps, straight over the turf towards him.

"Be you Squire Annesley?" asked the boy, stopping just in front of him, the sun blazing full on his hot face, white smock, and dusty boots.

"Yes, boy. What do you want?"

"Then this here's for you," he replied, producing a letter, "and she said there wasn't no answer." With that he turned, and was striding heavily back again without more ado.

"Stop, boy!" cried Edward, who had felt a thrill at first sight of his face, which he recognized vaguely as belonging to Arden; for all the faces there seemed to bear one family stamp. He gave the messenger a bright half-crown, and bid the servant take him in and give him food, but still did not appear in a hurry to read his letter.

"How very romantic!" observed Eleanor; "who is the 'she,' the fair, the chaste, the unexpressive she?"

"Er war mit Herz und Seele mein," sang Harriet, her mind still burdened with her melancholy ditty.

Then he broke the cover and read, his face changing from white to red and back to white again, till he folded the letter very exactly, and put it in his pocket with a thoughtful air. Presently he turned his gaze from the sunshiny trees and turf to his mother and sister, who were occupied with some trifling discussion,

"How would you like to spend the winter in Rome?" he asked. "You might go to Switzerland in August or September, and gradually creep on to Rome by November. We could shut up this house for a year. I might get a long leave and join you. What do you say?"

There was a long and animated discussion, and presently the two girls moved off, full of the new scheme, and left the others alone.

"It is all over," Edward then said to his mother. "She has refused me. Of course I shall think no more of it."

Then he rose and joined his sisters.

The letter was brief and formal. The writer hoped that Mr. Annesley would waste no more time upon an unprofitable subject upon which they could never come to any agreement. What occurred on the afternoon of the 10th of September last year made it impossible for her ever to entertain any thought of marriage. She hoped that in case of their meeting again, she might rely upon his bearing himself towards her as a friend, but nothing more.

This last sentence, which poor Alice would probably never have written but for her painful experience of Paul's tenacious courtship, was unfortunate in its effect upon Edward. It stung him into a fierce resentment, and made him seize his pen that evening and indite a haughty missive to the effect that Miss Lingard need not be in the least afraid of his troubling her with un-

welcome attentions, a letter that wounded her to the heart's core.

The long golden beams of the evening sun stole through the closed blinds and fell on his paper as he wrote; such long beams were then falling upon Gervase and Alice on the down above Arden, when the former was uttering the simple words which echoed so long through the memories of both, "Quite right."

PART V.

PART II

CHAPTER I.

AN ENGLISH TRIUMPH.

ALL the eight bells in the church steeple were pealing down in joyous tumult through the sun-gilt smoke canopy which was spread above the slate roofs of Medington one mild November afternoon; the streets of that quiet little town were filled with an unwonted life and stir, thickest and most turbulent in the vicinity of the town-hall, the open space in front of which was black with human beings. It is curious that crowds, no matter of what they may be composed, always are black; it is curious, too, that human faces in the mass are always of one tint, a very pale bronze without the faintest shade of pink; probably no one ever saw a crowd blush or turn pale, yet these truly awful phenomena must sometimes occur.

The windows surrounding the space before the town-hall were black with humanity, so was the balcony which served as hustings. When the eye became accustomed to the mass and began singling out its component parts, it detected many points of colour; a large

proportion of the men in the street wore the fustian garb of the artisan; the few female forms discernible at the windows or in carriages contributed less lugubrious tints, and on many a coat, whether of cloth or fustian, there fluttered gay bunches of ribbon, dark blue and crimson on some, light blue and yellow on others. Those who wore the pale colours were radiantly and triumphantly aggressive, those who wore the dark, sullenly and defiantly so. All were demeaning themselves like Bedlamites; a few sad and anxious policemen jostled about among them were trying not to observe anything, one of these in his efforts to preserve an indifferent and easy demeanour, seemed quite absorbed in a close and searching examination of the pale blue sky above, across which some pigeons were flying, their clanging wings unheard in the tumult; the fact that a band of musicians bearing the dark colours were flying precipitately down a side street, pursued by various missiles, kicks and thumps, with their hats now and then crushed over their noses, and their instruments vibrating to unmusicianly strokes, did not pierce through his apparent abstraction.

It was a scene to kindle wonder in the breast of an observant Chinaman or Bedouin Arab, if such had chanced to be strolling through Medington High Street just then. A gentleman on the balcony was gesticulating and shouting unheard in the tumult made by the bells, and the cheering, yelling, groaning and whistling of the crowd. Yet people appeared to be listening to this

frantic person through the uproar, and punctuated his discourse by hootings, hissings, cries of hear-hear and clapping of hands; also by more personal favours, such as bags of flour, which for the most part fell short of him and burst with uncalculated effect upon unsuspecting citizens below to the loud merriment of citizens not so favoured. He was succeeded by another orator, and yet another. Now and again somebody, usually some half-grown boy, would utter a hoarse, half-despairing, half-defiant shout of "Stuart for ever!" whereupon the citizens with light ribbons would fall upon him pell-mell, and hustle and thump him with most Christian vigour, themselves hustled and thumped in turn by a posse of dark colours, who would rush to the rescue of their side. Had the intelligent foreigners asked the reason of these sudden displays of fraternal feeling, the belligerents would probably have been puzzled how to answer them.

So great and overpowering was the joy in the breasts of the light colours, that one of them would occasionally crush the hat over the nose of a brother light colour, out of pure gladness of heart and excess of brotherly love. Shopkeepers had hastily put up their shutters at the first crash of the bells, and prudent people, and those who preferred quiet enjoyments to the turbulent delights of laying about them with their fists, had cautiously transferred the dark colours, if so unfortunate as to wear them, from their coats to their pockets, a device which little profited one unlucky citizen, who

effected the transfer more quickly than dexterously, and was betrayed by the ends of the streamers peeping from his coat-tail pockets; he was finally seen fleeing coatless down a back street, after having furnished infinite sport to the Philistine crowd.

The balcony was now cleared, the crowd centred itself closely about a carriage waiting at the principal door of the town-hall, and removed the astonished horses decked with light blue favours from the traces; this was the moment for another carriage, bearing dark favours and standing at a door in a side street, to take up a gentleman whose smile was rather forced, and bear him swiftly away. A great deep cheer, such a sound as comes only from broad-chested Englishmen, now rose with gathering intensity like the rising thunder of a league-long breaker and almost silenced the clashing bells, which were firing their sonorous salutes; the windows became white with the flutter of ladies' handkerchiefs; the crowd exhibited severer signs of dementia, and then a slight figure issued hat in hand from the hall and took his seat in the carriage, followed by three taller and broader men, all wearing the triumphant light favours. Then the carriage moved slowly on, pulled and pushed by strong-armed, loud-voiced citizens, few of whom had any direct influence on the election; bouquets fell into it from ladies' hands; a citizen, unduly influenced by beer, staggered forwards and shook a devious fist in the faces of the gentlemen in the carriage, thickly shouting, "Stuart for ever!" and

then fell into the arms of a policeman, where he wept and told the policeman he loved him like a brother, and, amid shouts of "Rickman for ever!" declarations of the triumphant majority and exultant cheers, the carriage, followed by the light-favoured band, wedged its way through the square and moved up the principal street.

The Chinaman and the Arab would have been gratified by the sight of one sane and calm person in the midst of this strange madness, namely the central figure of all the tumult, who sat serenely observing everything, with the declining sun firing his fair hair, and a very slight expression of disdain upon his thoughtful and resolute face, which was pale with the fatigue of the last few weeks, but the habitual look of power and purpose on which was undisturbed by any sign of excitement or triumph.

"It is the first step," he thought to himself; yet he was constrained to confess, that although it was a fine thing for a young provincial attorney of no particular family or local influence to be returned a Liberal member for that fine old Conservative borough, the first Liberal member within the memory of man, it was a very long way from ruling England and perhaps the world, which latter would need some slight alterations before being ruled by England. But "the rest will follow," Gervase thought, knowing that almost anything is possible to a born ruler with a fixed purpose and resolute will. Mrs. Walter Annesley, leaning from her open window to throw him

a bouquet bound with his colours and receive his deferential salute, felt a thrill of pride when she looked upon the pale intellectual face, so self-contained and calm amid the mad tumult; and when she contrasted the expression of his countenance with that of his supporters in the carriage, two of whom were well-known public men, and all of whom were flushed with excitement at this unexpected accession to their party, she echoed Gervase's thought, "the rest will follow." She knew too that these men, with whom Gervase had been actively working for some time before he stood for the borough, expected a great deal to follow from talents such as his. Gervase was in some sort her own creation; she had given him substantial aid; and it was she who had introduced him to the Liberal ex-Cabinet Minister who would not fail to see that powers so exceptional as his should be put to good use. Through Gervase, life had acquired a fresh interest for Mrs. Annesley; his career would feed the pride which had been so cruelly crushed by her son's untimely death.

At this moment Gervase smiled, for his observant eye caught a glimpse of Dr. Davis, that worthy alderman and ex-mayor, that staid and important medical gentleman and acknowledged leading practitioner, being hustled and bonneted, and laying about him manfully in defence of his dark favours, which the triumphant Radicals were trying to snatch. A little farther on, that discreet and learned limb of the law, Mr. Pergament, was ignominiously bolting down a side street and

vanishing into the darkness of a friendly passage, the door of which opened for him, and Mr. Daish, Rickman's own partner, arm-in-arm with Mr. Dates, the grocer, was marching along in triumph, colours flying, and uttering spasmodic cries of "Rickman for ever! Hurrah!"

Gervase wondered if any other influence save that of strong drink would have power thus to move these grave sons of civilization from their wonted decorum, and mused deeply on the eccentricities of the national temperament, so ponderously and immovably solemn, and yet on occasion so absurdly boyish and capable of rollicking fun. Here was a quiet little town, full of sad-faced shopkeepers and stolid working-men, going stark mad because somebody was about to represent some of them—a very small proportion—in Parliament. It amused him excessively to think that he was supposed to represent the cumulative political mind of such a set of simpletons. He thought what humbug representative government was, even if pushed to the logical fulness of universal suffrage. The great thing in moving the masses, he reflected, is to have a cry, a catchword, the more dubious in meaning the better. He had seen two little girls slap each other's faces because one was for Rickman and the other for Stuart. The crowd surging about him and dragging his carriage knew and cared little more than those little maids for the meaning of the cry, most of them had no votes, the most enthusiastic were the street boys. Some voices, it

is true, shouted "the ballot" and "extension of suffrage," but even these were catchwords for the most part, caught up from constant iteration in recent speeches and newspapers. So it was and so it will be. The cries of Guelf and Ghibelline rent the Italian communities of the Middle Ages asunder, and one of the factions formed by these cries was itself cut into Blacks and Whites in Florence in the days of Dante, whose life was soured for a word's sake. There were catchwords in the olden days of

"The glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome."

There are catchwords in the youngest colonies of to-day, and he, thought the new member for Medington, who knows how to fashion and wield catchwords knows how to rule mankind.

After all, what are catchwords but imperfect and attenuated symbols, and what are symbols but bodies to the souls of thoughts? Perhaps even worn-out soul-vacated symbols are better than absolute vacancy.

Mr. Rickman, half-incredulous of his senses, sat with Sibyl at a window looking towards the town-hall and heard the final state of the poll declared; Sibyl heard it with less surprise but with a gladness which made her eyes brighter than ever; she smiled inwardly at the sight of her brother's triumph, the comic side of which did not fail to appeal to her.

Alice had refused to be present, and Gervase had

thought this a good sign. Mrs. Rickman had declined going, on the ground that her son's possible defeat would be too serious a thing to learn in public, in which Alice agreed with her; they stayed at home to console each other.

In those days, before the ballot and compulsory education and all such fine recipes for the regeneration of mankind, news did not fly quite so fast as now; people were not on such familiar terms with their freshly tamed demon, electricity, and country roads were not cobwebbed with telegraph wires. I think nobody had as yet thought of extending and multiplying the plague of human babble and other noises by means of wires and drums.

Thus people in Arden were ignorant of the result of the great political battle raging within a few miles of them; there was no cannon-thunder to come booming on the wind to the listening ears of the villagers; the nearest approach to the noise of fight was the faint confused swirl of the Medington bells, when the eddying wind rushed up the valley and over the downs with a larger sway, and that far-off sound merely told them that the battle was lost and won, as most battles are; it did not say who was the victor in the bloodless fray. Nevertheless, Raysh Squire, with a large dark blue and crimson favour, pinned with ostentatious profusion upon his jacket, descended early in the afternoon into the village for news and naturally took his way to the Golden Horse, which, besides, was the first house in

the street, as the proper magazine for that commodity. But the Golden Horse offered absolutely no attractions that afternoon, beyond the gross and obvious charms of potent liquor; even the landlord was absent, and the landlady was not in the mood for social intercourse.

Just opposite the Golden Horse, on the same side of the high-road and forming the other corner house to the by-road which led past the parsonage and on to the churchyard, stood a solid stone cottage, so old that it had sunk a couple of feet beneath the level of the high-road, which, perhaps, when new it dominated; like the leaders of thought, who in their golden prime stand above mankind, but, as Time rushes on, depositing a thick sediment of fresh ideas, sink gradually into the groove of old-fashioned thinkers.

This sunken condition, though inconvenient in heavy rains, added, in Raysh's opinion, to the charm of the cheery little home, because it enabled one, without stirring from the cosy ingle-nook, to see over the flowers in the window the lower parts of everything that passed, thus enabling a person of imagination to divine the whole, and preventing small things from being overlooked, and here he was wont to spend many a leisure quarter of an hour at the hearth of his daughter, who was married to Joshua Baker, the vicar's gardener, and had more than once conferred the dignity of grandfather upon him.

It looked specially inviting in the mild November day; the pear-tree spread over the blank gabled wall

facing the inn, though leafless, was yet suggestive of mellow fruitage, and the few flowers in the tiny channel between the bricked-up road and the windows, though past bloom were still cheerful; the geraniums inside the diamonded lattices were glowing with scarlet blossoms, the pale sun-beams brought out warm tints in the stone and thatch, and rosy-faced Ruth stood in the doorway, with a baby in her arms and an infant playing on the dry road in front of her, to take the air and see the world.

"Who's in?" she asked, moving aside, while Raysh descended the two steps and bowed his head to enter the low doorway, which admitted at once to the dwelling-room, a cosy little nest, pervaded by the vague odour peculiar to country cottages and mellowed rather than darkened by the smoke of years.

"That's just what I was agwine to ask," returned Raysh, dropping into the wooden arm-chair fronting the window and tapping the bowl of his pipe on the hearth, on which burnt a fire of wood and furze, making warm reflections in the walnut dresser with its shining plates and cups, and on the tall oak-cased eight-day clock which ticked with a familiar home-like sound against the smoke-browed wall. "Aint Josh home?"

"No; Josh likes to see what's going on. You may be bound he won't start home till he knows who's got in."

Then Raysh informed his daughter that a person from Medington passing through Arden at midday had

declared the state of the poll to show a majority for Rickman. "'Twas a Liberal lie," he commented, not intending any double meaning. "They thinks if only they lies hard enough, 'twill hearten up 'tothers to vote on the winning side."

"I wish Josh wouldn't bide in Medington," returned Ruth, whose politics were of a purely personal cast. "I can't abide these lections; they're nothing but drink and broken heads, so fur as I can make out, and family men are better out of them."

"It takes a powerful mind to see into politics," observed Raysh; "politics is beyond women. For why? A ooman's mind is made to hold in-door things; 'taint big enough for out-door."

Ruth reflected on this remark in silence, while she laid her baby in the cradle and called the elder child in by the fire, where it babbled happily to itself.

"What has politics to do with Mr. Gervase getting in?" she asked at length. "Many's the time I've asked Josh what politics is, and all he can say is 'it's what the women can't understand.' There must be a power of politics in the world, for there's a many things I can't understand."

"Understanding," continued Raysh, "aint expected of women. They talks over much already without understanding, and the Lard only knows where their tongues would be if they'd a got summat to talk about! There's mercy in the way a ooman's made after all, Ruth. Politics now is a mazing subject; it makes the

men talk pretty nigh so fast as the women. I've a yeared em say these yer members 'll talk two hours at a stretch in Parlyment; some on em 'll goo on vur dree or vour hours when they be wound up. They does nothing but talk, so vur as I can zee—a talky traäde is politics, a talky traäde."

"I haven't anything agen the talk," replied Ruth, "it's the drink and the broken heads I can't abide. There! it's gone four and the bit of dinner done to death aready. One side is as bad as the other, so fur as I can see."

"You caint see fur, Ruth; you aint made to, and you med war'nt whenever a ooman tries to look funder than Providence meant her to, there's mischief. Taint every man can zee into politics, let alone a female ooman. Politics has two zides. One zide's vur keeping what we've a-got, 'tother's for drowing of it all away. A mis'able mazing subjick is politics—mis'able mazing, to be sure."

"I'm sure I wish they'd keep their politics up in Parlyment and not bring em down this country-side, throwing temptation in the way of steady family men with their living to get," said Ruth, going to the door and once more looking vainly down the road for the truant husband, whose dinner was spoilt now beyond remedy.

"Ay, that's the way with the women," continued her father reflectively; "there aint hroom inside of em vur out-door speculations. Their minds is made vur to

hold vittles and clothes, and children and claning and sickness. I 'lows there aint hroom enough inside o they vur mazing subjecks like politics. But there aint no call vor ee to hrun out agen what you caint understand, Ruth. Providence have a-made politics vur men-volks, zo as they med hae zummat to talk about and hrade in the newspapers when they've a done work. Providence have a-made politics vur gentlevolks zo as they med hae zummat to do when they baint a hunting or a shooting. Whatever would gentlevolks do if they'd hadn't a got no politics? I 'lows they'd pretty nigh fret the skin off their boäns, they'd be that dull and drug. You haint no call to hrun out agen Providence, Ruth." Raysh sighed with a pious air, and shook his head over his daughter's errors, the latter hearing him with the tolerant reflection that men-folk would have their say, and it mattered little what they said.

The western sky was all a-fire with crimson, melting into a violet zenith; delicate opal-tinted cloudlets were breaking apart over the pale blue on the south horizon, and still Joshua had not returned. The little room was aglow now with firelight, and sent warm gleams across the road through the diamond lattice and the open door; further on the Golden Horse's bar-window cast ruddy beams upon the sycamore boles outside; a distant glow down the village revealed the forge, where the clink, clink, of the blacksmith's hammer made cheery melody to the burring accompaniment of bellows and flame; a faint blue mist lay over the fields, and an

eddy of wind sent the dry aromatic leaves hurrying across the road as if driven by a sudden panic, like those souls which Dante saw driven confusedly to the dark waves of Acheron, where the grim ferryman's oar chastised the loiterers; then the eddy turned, and the panic-stricken rush of the leaves changed to a light ærial dance, joyous and graceful, till the dancers dropped in the dust as if with sudden weariness. The hands of the tall clock in the cottage pointed to near five when Mrs. Rickman was returning with Alice Lingard and Hubert, the latter very magnificent in the Liberal colours, from a walk; lingering every now and then to talk to a cottager, though her mind was far too pre-occupied with the one subject of Gervase's election for her discourse to be very connected.

"Joshua not home yet?" she asked, pausing at Ruth's door. "Well, Raysh, what a mild evening! No; we have heard nothing yet. Miss Lingard took me out of the way on purpose. We don't in the least expect my son to be returned, but I shall be sorry all the same, and bad news, you know, will keep."

This Mrs. Rickman had repeated in various different ways fifty times that afternoon to Alice, who took a more sanguine view of the question, though she, too, was nervous. Mrs. Rickman's final remark had been, "Whatever we do, Alice, we must not condole with him. We must look upon the defeat as a matter of course."

But they had not been seated many minutes by Ruth's hearth, when a heavy step was heard upon the road, and Joshua himself, unconscious of visitors, stamped noisily down the steps and on to the sanded floor crying, "Hooray! Rickman's in!"

CHAPTER II.

BY THE HEARTH.

JOSHUA BAKER received as guerdon for his news an unexpected five shillings from Mrs. Rickman and an expected scolding from Ruth, for he had not only wasted hours in Medington, but had evidently been in a skirmish, of which he bore the proof in rent garments.

"Whatever call had ye for to go fighting when you knowed Mr. Rickman was in?" his wife asked.

"Two or dree was laying about them," he explained, "and I thought I med so well jine in," an explanation that did not satisfy Ruth, whose feminine mind had not room in it to admit the obvious fact that no sensible man can keep still when there is good fighting to be had for nothing. But these confidences took place after the visitors had left the cottage, which they very quickly did, walking over the dry dead leaves lying thickly in their path, with hearts ready to dance with the lightness of the dancing leaves.

"I suppose it is true, Alice," said Mrs. Rickman, pausing with a shock of misgiving beneath the sycamores and looking dubiously towards Medington at the crimson

western sky, which glowed through the dark elms, the delicate leafless branches and tall trunks of which were traced blackly against the warm colours. Alice laughingly re-assured her, and they hastened up the lane to the Manor, just as one or two liquid stars appeared above its chimneys in the pale green sky.

"It is surprising," Mrs. Rickman continued, "that your uncle and I should have two such clever children. To be sure we had only two."

"Quality is better than quantity," replied Alice, wondering if Mrs. Rickman thought that Gervase and Sibyl inherited the concentrated power of a baker's dozen of children.

"I believe that Sibyl is writing a book, Alice," Mrs. Rickman said with a mysterious air, as they reached the flight of steps leading into the porch, through the half-open door of which a warm light streamed. "Her father says that she is capable of anything after that last article of hers on compulsory education; though I daresay Gervase gave her all the ideas, if he did not write half of it. And now I should like to see him married to a really nice girl to whom I could be a mother."

"So should I," returned Alice tranquilly; "but I should be jealous of the nice girl, Aunt Jenny; that is, if you were too fond of her."

No sooner had they entered the hall than all the servants came crowding into it, with John Nobbs, the bailiff, and his wife, all eager to proclaim the good

tidings; and scarcely had the congratulations and comments subsided, when a carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Rickman and Sibyl, the latter radiant with excitement, sprang out, and the congratulations began over again; wine was brought, and the new member's health was enthusiastically drunk.

Alice stood a little apart, with Hubert lying at her feet, as if studying the scene with interest, and looked on at the animated group with deeply stirred feelings, in which warm affection for her adopted parents and Sibyl predominated. Her lip trembled, and tears, which she could not explain, dimmed the figures standing in the blaze of the hearth-fire, dimmed the oak-panelled walls, full of mysterious shadows, the swinging lamp overhead, the glitter of glasses, and the decanter from which Sibyl was pouring the sparkling wine with a face infinitely more sparkling; and the thought came to her that in the happiness of these people, who were so dear to her, she too might find a little gladness. Yet she reproached herself because she was not glad enough and did not overflow with high spirits like Sibyl, forgetting the difference in their temperaments, and calling herself selfish. But how long would this happiness last? she wondered, thinking of Gervase's insatiable ambition, and the stormy and uncertain career on which he was launched.

She was nearer the door than the others, and the pricking of Hubert's ears called her attention to the rumble of approaching wheels, unheard by the bacchana-

lian group before the hearth, and so it happened that she went to the door and opened it just as Gervase's carriage drew up, and the first thing he saw was her figure in the arched doorway traced upon the glowing light from within, with the watchful Hubert by her side, decked with his colours.

It was the sweetest moment in the day to him; in a moment he had cleared the steps, and was standing with both hands clasped in Alice's, receiving her cordial greeting, "Dear Gervase, I *am* glad! I think we have all lost our senses with pleasure."

She was not surprised that his hands trembled as she held them, or that they retained their pressure long after she had relaxed hers, or that he did not speak for some moments in answer to the congratulations showered upon him. He was tired and excited, overwrought with the tension of the last few weeks; no wonder he was not quite himself.

Leaving him to the tender mercies of his family, she went herself to the deserted kitchen and fetched the coffee which had been made ready for him, and administered it before any one else had time to think of it, with the observation that even heroes are mortal.

"One might think," observed the hero, after gratefully taking the coffee, "that nobody ever got into Parliament before. As the Scotch nurse said to the dying woman, 'Hech, hizzie, dinna mak such a stour, ye're nae the first to dee.' Why even Hubert condescends to notice me."

"Since mounting your colours he considers himself a politician," Alice replied; but she was not sure that Hubert's glance was of an entirely friendly nature, for though he went up to receive the offered pat on the head with his usual stateliness, the white of his eyes was distinctly visible.

A reaction is inevitable after excitement. The family party, after dinner a couple of hours later, was unusually quiet. They were all in the white drawing-room, one window of which was uncurtained and showed the quiet night sky, moonless but throbbing with the pale brilliance of stars, and occasionally irradiated by the flashing trail of a meteor. Alice, seated at the piano, could see through this window, the very window in which she was sitting when Edward Annesley, himself a meteor flashing through the peaceful starlight of her youth, first saw her. She was playing soft and dreamy music of her own imagining, as she so frequently did when seeking to express her feelings; she seemed to be drawing the inspiration for her music from the tranquil star-worlds towards which her face was turned. Sibyl was reclining in a chair, doing nothing but listen to Alice and stroke the cat upon her knee, to the anger of Hubert, who was observing puss with one eye, as he lay at his mistress's feet with his muzzle on his fore-paws. Mr. Rickman slept audibly in his chair on one side of the hearth with a newspaper folded on his knee; Mrs. Rickman slumbered peacefully in her chair on the other side of the hearth;

the future ruler of England, if not the world, appeared to be following his parents' example in the corner of a sofa, but, though his eyes seemed to be closed, they were in reality as watchful as Hubert's, and were aware of every slight movement of Alice, as she swayed over her instrument making music and looking with an earnest gaze at the starry sky. Every curve in the graceful form traced against the comparative darkness of window and sky, every change in her thoughtful face, and every note that answered the touch of her slender skilful fingers, stirred the depths of his heart with an intensity that was akin to pain. She was not happy, that was too evident: and yet it was long since that evening on the down when he uttered those two fateful words, "Quite right;" summer had faded and bloomed and faded again till the fourth winter from that summer was upon them. Yet in all that time he had seen no change in the sadness which then settled upon her, nor found anything to warrant any indulgence of his hopes, and during that lapse of time Alice had scarcely seen Edward Annesley.

When the Annesleys chanced to be at Gledesworth it happened that Alice was not at Arden; she was more often away from home than in former days. Had it gone so hard with her? Gervase wondered, did she really care so much for that "good-looking fool?" or was this sadness only the vague unrest of a woman the promise of whose youth is unfulfilled? Sibyl had not that look of deep inward sorrow.

While he was thus observing her with a yearning gaze, she turned her head from the window and looked towards the hearth, meeting his eye, and smiled a smile of perfect confidence and affection, which transfigured her face and stirred him with a vague trouble.

He left his place and drew a chair to the piano, on which she continued to play. "I thought I had caught you napping for once, Gervase," she said.

"You will never do that," Sibyl said, looking up from the cat she was petting and teasing, "he is the proverbial weasel. I mean to hide in his room some night to see if he ever really sleeps."

"The world," he replied, "belongs to the man who can wake longest. 'Before her gate (*i.e.* Honour's) high God did sweat ordain And wakeful watches ever to abide.' Am I quoting rightly, Sibyl?"

There arose a dispute about the quotation, the music died away, and Sibyl was so provokingly confident that the lines occurred in a sonnet, while Alice was as firmly convinced that they belonged to the Faerie Queene, that Alice left the room for the purpose of fetching Spenser from his bookshelf in proof.

"People ought never to be in earnest after dinner, especially when everybody is tired," said Sibyl, petulantly, upsetting the cat, and taking Alice's place at the piano; "earnestness is Alice's besetting sin, and I believe it is ruining her digestion."

Sibyl played in her spasmodic fashion snatches from different composers, for she had not Alice's grace-

ful gift of transmuting her own fancies into music as they arose; her parents slept on, and Gervase gradually, after a fashion of his own, got himself from a photograph book, to a picture on the wall, and thence to a piece of bric-à-brac, until he reached the doorway, through which he silently disappeared. Thus when Alice, having verified the quotation, issued from the bookroom to the hall with her heavy volume, she found Gervase standing before the hearth, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, which was getting low.

When she appeared, he kicked a log into place, thus stirring the decaying embers, and making some fresh wood kindle.

"Come," he said, pointing to a carved oak settle; "it is nice here, quite *gemüthlich*, and we can talk at our ease."

Alice wondered that a man who had had such a surfeit of talk during the last few weeks did not take the opportunity of enjoying a little silence, but took her place on the settle, laying the great book on the table, and told him about the Spenserian quotation, while he knelt on one knee before the hearth and plied the bellows, with the air of a man whose fate depended upon rousing a crackling flame from the logs.

At last he made a noble fire, the brightness of which leapt up into the dark beams of the ceiling, danced airily over the black panels, playing at hide and seek with the lurking shadows in them, and quite overpowering the light of the swinging lamp. Then he

rose, and stood leaning against the carved chimney jamb, looking down into Alice's face, which was irradiated by the brilliant blaze, saying nothing.

She spoke of the times when their favourite winter sport was making the hall fire burn, and of their rivalries and quarrels over the bellows.

"Sometimes," she said, "I think the pleasantest thing in life is to remember what one did as a child. But none of us could make such a fire as you could. It is a pity," she concluded, "a really first-rate career as a stoker has been marred for the sake of——"

"An indifferent one in politics," he added. "But no, Alice, it will not be indifferent, it will and must be brilliant, and I shall owe it to you if it is."

"To me? Are you dreaming, Gervase?"

"No; I am speaking sober truth. No one has nursed my ambition and cherished and developed my energies as you have, Alice. You always believed in me; you have been my inspiration; but for you I should have dared little and done less. You would never dream what you are to me, dearest."

His voice quivered a little and lost its usual energetic ring; it touched her heart and made her hesitate to reply. "It is kind of you to say that," she faltered at last, "I have always hoped to be a good sister to you, next to Sibyl. You have been more than brother to me."

"I *am* more than brother," he replied, in his fuller tones; then he paused a moment. "Alice," he con-

tinued, "this has been a fortunate day for me, marking my first step in public life; I have, as you know, a little superstition about lucky days, and I hope this may prove fortunate in another sense. Public life, power, success, all these do not fill a man's life. There are deeper things that touch him nearer home, that are the foundation upon which he builds the superstructure of active life. A happy domestic centre is a necessity to one who is to do good work in the world. Nothing is any good to a man whose heart is hollowed out by unsatisfied yearnings and vain hopes."

Her face grew graver as she listened to the deepening vibrations in the mellow voice, which was not invariably mellow, but sometimes harsh; and her heart ached. She knew what was coming; the old trouble which she thought for ever at rest, was starting afresh into life. He was very dear to her, dearer than she thought, and the prospect of having to wound him in an hour so happy, and casting such a cloud over his first triumph, was inexpressibly painful. She could not meet his gaze; she averted her head and watched the firelight playing over a panel and making the suit of armour in front of it stand out grim and full of hostile suggestion. Hubert sat up with his head just above her knee, and a look of sympathy in his eyes. "The dog at least is faithful and true," shot across her mind with no apparent relevance; for whom did she suspect of falsehood?

"Oh, Gervase!" she exclaimed, "I did so trust in

your brotherhood! I thought you had kept your promise."

"I did keep it till now—and at such a cost! Can you think what it must be to live in perpetual warfare with oneself? To crush the best and dearest feelings? Oh, Alice! have I not tried all these years? Have I not stood by in silence and seen others preferred? Did I not see your trouble, and yet was silent? Did I ever by word or look betray what I could not conquer? I have often said that will can conquer everything, and it is true. But something has conquered me, it is stronger than even my strong will. And unless you can give me some hope, Alice, nothing will ever be any good to me."

"If I had but foreseen this," she replied, "I would have gone away; I would never have stayed near you to encourage false hopes."

"Not false; they *must* realize themselves, being so strong and invincible," he returned in a tone that made her tremble; for it recalled his passionate assertion on the downs so long ago that he would win her in spite of herself. And all things seemed to conspire that he should win her. A remorseless fate seemed to be slowly hedging her in and driving her to bay; her life was barren and desolate, her will in comparison with that of Gervase was as silk to iron. He had a secret mastery over her which sometimes repelled her when she felt most tenderly towards him, for she was not one of those singularly constituted women who like, or profess to

like, to have a master; her pride and self-respect revolted at the notion of subjection. Whenever she was conscious of this mastery, her heart turned from him, and she feared him and dreaded her own weakness.

Instantly he was aware of the change his words produced in her, and knew he had made a false step, on which he hastened to return; he saw the proud blood flash to her cheek as she hardened her gaze to meet his.

"It is so hard to have no hope," he added, in a tone that at once disarmed her. "Life is new to you, Alice, fresh interests might still arise for you—in the course of time. I can wait."

She said nothing; but her tears fell. Then he told her how he had tried, and tried in vain to conquer his feelings through all these years, and spoke of the exquisite pain of being so near to her and yet so far off, of the difficulty of the part he had had to play, of seeing her suffer and being impotent to help her. He spoke of their years of affectionate intercourse, of his parents' wishes and of the sorrow they would feel if they had to part with her. He hinted that it was impossible during the hey-day of youth to live always in the past, that it was well sometimes to turn down a leaf for ever in the book of life, and begin afresh with new aims and hopes. Life was full of duty and responsibility, and to make a fellow-creature happy was no mean aim.

She believed every word he said, and her heart

bled for him. He believed most of it himself; for when people are in the habit of manipulating statements of facts to suit their own purposes, the distinction between the actual and the desirable is apt to grow very shadowy, and to deliver a round unvarnished tale becomes a Herculean labour of the first magnitude.

But she could only tell him, as gently as possible, that his hopes were vain; and then they were interrupted.

Gervase was not sorry for the interruption. He thought enough had been said for the time, and was as satisfied as it is possible for a man who is very much in love to be on receiving a direct refusal. This refusal was very different from the first; all the circumstances in Alice's life were now different and more in his favour. When they went upstairs, he sat very comfortably before the blaze of the drawing-room fire, feeling that things were advancing, however slowly. Chance had again set Alice against the background of the star-lit sky. He looked at her pale and troubled face, and saw a falling star shoot across the heavens behind her at the very moment when his heart was uttering the passionate wish of his life. The star made him almost certain of success; he asked Sibyl if she had seen it and remembered to wish, and set Mr. Rickman off upon one of his interminable monologues on shooting-stars and the various superstitions and fancies connected with them, thus giving himself leisure to be silent and think

in peace, and Alice space to recover from her perturbation unobserved.

Alice sat long by her fire that night, instead of going to bed; she was too much stirred to sleep, and was a prey to a ceaseless whirl of thoughts over which predominated the foreboding that she would ultimately marry Gervase in spite of herself. She thought of the years she had spent under that roof, of the deep ineradicable feelings which were twined about the familiar trees, gables and garden plots of Arden. The very figures in the carved oak were old and dear friends; no place could ever wear the same homelike face for her. She had always admired Gervase's talents, done homage to the energy of his character, and felt the charm of his society. But in the last year or two he had gradually come to fill a larger space in her life. A vague unspoken something had arisen between herself and Sibyl since the day when each read the other's secret, the complete confidence of their early friendship was broken by the reticence that discovery created on each side; though their affection was not diminished. At the same time the bitter sorrow through which Alice had passed created a stronger need for the healing of affectionate intimacy, and she unconsciously threw herself more and more on Gervase's friendship.

When a man tells a woman of his struggles and difficulties, it is not only a sign that he has a very deep regard for her, but it is the surest way of winning her heart. This Gervase knew. He believed that Othello

would have sighed in vain, but for the happy instinct which made him relate the perilous adventures which so stirred Desdemona's fancy and touched her heart; in which case she might have escaped suffocation and lived to a green old age; while but for similar narratives on the part of Æneas, Dido of Carthage would never have mounted the famous pyre. Therefore he fell into the habit of confiding his ambitions, aims and struggles to Alice—with a certain reserve, of course; for it is not to be supposed that Desdemona was in a position to compile a complete biography of Othello while Dido was very far from knowing the whole history of Æneas; it is even possible that both these warriors, like Goethe, may have mingled a little *Dichtung* with the *Wahrheit* out of their lives, it is certain that Gervase was far too clever not to do so. Thus Gervase had gradually become dearer to Alice; he made her life sufferable in the heavy sorrow which had desolated it.

The pale resolute face, alive with intellect and energy, and spiritualized by the worthiest passion he had known; the slight but strong figure, imposing though small, haunted her, and his voice, mellowed and deepened by feeling, rang in her ears. Most great men have been small, she remembered, and only men with voices of a certain power can directly influence democratic communities. Ought she to mar the splendid career before him for the sake of her own feelings? What had she to live for but the welfare of that family?

Then there came a sudden warmth about her heart and she seemed to see the face of Edward Annesley, aglow with the "sweet and sudden passion of youth," as she had first seen it with a kind of passionate surprise, when she looked up from her spring flowers and felt the spring-time of life stirred within her.

She could never forget that; even the crime which set their lives asunder could not quench the love which was kindled in the days of innocence. It would be a sin to marry one man when she felt this for another.

CHAPTER III.

SIBYL.

NEXT morning the new member for Medington, who only allowed himself the solace of one night at Arden in recompense for the labours of the few weeks preceding his election, left early and did not see Alice again for some time, except occasionally in the presence of others.

Although Parliament was prorogued until February, he had a great deal of political business on hand that winter; his fluent and flashy rhetoric being in great request at one or two bye-elections and club-meetings, whither he went at the instance of the ex-Minister and party chief to whom Mrs. Walter Annesley had introduced him, and who wished to make all the possible use of so keen and delicate an instrument as that he had lighted upon in Gervase Rickman.

But Gervase wrote frequently to Alice; charming letters, full of pungent reflections on the scenes and men which passed before him, full of personal confidences and kindly jests, and not too affectionate. He knew better than to reopen the question of marriage,

and only occasionally alluded to hopes which lay in the future, and feelings which might never be gratified. He had made the important step of prevailing on her to entertain the idea of marrying him, he wisely left that idea to germinate silently within her mind. Impulsive, warm-hearted Sibyl had often been laughed at as a child for digging up her flower-seeds to see how they were growing; but Gervase's seeds had always been left undisturbed beneath the dark mould to fulfil their inevitable destiny, and at the same time had enjoyed more systematic watering and weeding than Sibyl's.

Mrs. Rickman now spoke to Alice of her wishes, which, of course were moulded on her son's, and even Mr. Rickman withdrew his mind for a brief space from the contemplation of scientific facts and the formulating of all sorts of theories, to tell Alice how happy she would make the evening of his life if she would marry his only son. Alice assured them that she would certainly marry no one else, and would not leave them unless they drove her forth on the advent of a more suitable daughter-in-law. Even Mrs. Walter Annesley arrayed herself on Gervase's side, and went so far as to hint to Alice that moral suttee could scarcely be expected even of a young woman who might have married her son, especially when there was a chance of sharing and stimulating a career so brilliant as that of Gervase promised to be. A sort of paralysis of the will crept upon Alice under all this; she felt the iron power of a destiny which seemed to be closing her in on every

side, and all she could do was to pray for strength to do what would work for the happiness of others.

Then something occurred which powerfully stimulated her halting purpose.

The Annesleys did not return to Gledesworth after the winter abroad which Edward had proposed as a temporary change. Their experience of living at Coventry in a country-house was too grey when contrasted with the vivid glow of Continental travel (not then so common as now); the girls acquired the habits of English Bedouins, and were seized by the strange fascination of a wealthy nomadic existence in those sunny countries which not only teem with historic association, but are the homes of art. Therefore they only returned to England for an occasional visit to London.

But Edward Annesley made it a duty to visit Gledesworth from time to time and see personally into the affairs of the property, though he was not recognized by the landed gentry, or either asked or permitted to perform any of those genial public duties which belong to that class. The cloud upon his name grew darker with time, but he continued to maintain that time would finally dissipate it. His manner changed totally during this period; he became reserved, cold, taciturn and gloomy. All this did not tend to soften his painful position among his brother-officers, who did not recognize his existence more than they were obliged by their unwritten code of etiquette. His next brother,

Wilfrid, also a military man, a Royal Engineer, implored him to leave the service for his own sake, but in vain. He replied that the army was his chosen profession, and that he intended to stick to his colours, and serve his country while he could; he was not to be driven away by the clatter of a few venomous tongues, whose venom he would justify by yielding. Then he invented a gun, and was not without hope that it would one day be adopted by the authorities. At this time he looked as grim and aggressive as his own gun.

Yet there was one in whose presence his face brightened and his tongue was unloosed, and that one was Sibyl Rickman. She sometimes visited the Annesleys in their foreign haunts, and Edward usually made his visits coincide with hers. When he paid his brief visits to Gledesworth he always went to the Manor, and whether by chance or purpose, it often befell that Sibyl was at home and Alice absent at these times. One day Gervase suddenly told him that he could not have his sister's affections trifled with any longer, and that in fact if he had no intentions he must be off at once. Edward was indignant at the supposition that Sibyl's affections had been touched, much less trifled with; but Gervase pointed out to him that the world's opinion was on his side, and that Paul Annesley was not the only person to suppose him to be smitten with Sibyl at his first visit to the Manor; that he had been taken in himself, and so undoubtedly had Sibyl. Gervase had always supposed, he said, that having thoughtlessly used

Sibyl as a blind before Paul's death, Edward's subsequent attentions had been deliberate, else he would never for a moment have tolerated them.

From hot indignation Edward passed to cool reflection, and from hoping that Sibyl had never thought seriously of him, he proceeded to the notion that to win such a heart as hers would make life liveable once more. Gervase, with his accustomed discretion, had left him to digest these unwelcome observations the moment he had delivered himself of them, rightly divining that he had cast his handful of seed in a good soil.

Edward had from the first recognized Sibyl's charm and appreciated her guileless character and bright wit, and the more he thought of her the better he liked her, and the more he pondered, by the light of memory, on Gervase's hints as to her probable view of the relations between them, the more plausible did they appear to him. It was but just to Wilfrid to marry before the latter had built any decided expectations on his celibacy.

All good men like the idea of marriage in the abstract, it is only bad fellows who look with a cynical and incredulous eye upon wedded bliss (for which they are obviously unfit); Edward Annesley was no exception to this rule, knowing from his observation of mankind that the human male is vastly improved by being brought into proper subjection and tamed to the female hand.

Therefore with renewed hope he once more set forth in search of a wife.

It was on a cold Christmas Eve, the ponds were frozen and unspoilt by snow; Sibyl, who skated well, had met him more than once on the ice, and his hopes had been stimulated during the courses they had made together hand-in-hand, to the admiration of all beholders; for Sibyl looked so happy and so pretty while skating, that it was enough to make an old man and even an old woman young to look at her.

Alice and Sibyl were busy decorating the church that winter afternoon when Edward Annesley arrived at Arden. He soon made his way to the church and looked into the hoary interior, where the gloom was intensified by the dim ray of a candle or two, and where the air was aromatic with fir and bay, and saw the two girls, with some more young people, intent on hammering up wreaths. He soon joined them and held hammers and handed wreaths about; till Sibyl left them to go to the belfry, where the despotic Raysh had compelled them to keep their material, in search of fresh wreaths. Presently he followed her, unobserved except by Raysh. Alice, at whose bidding Sibyl had gone, growing tired of waiting, after a time went to remonstrate at having to work single-handed. But Raysh, seeing her approach, waved her back from the belfry-door, which stood ajar, with a mysterious air.

"I 'lows there baint hroom for me and you in there," he said; "coorten," he added, confidentially.

Then the situation became clear to her; she could see the two figures in the light beyond the crack of the door, talking earnestly and apparently oblivious of everything around them. The evergreens were piled up inconveniently round them in obedience to the dictum of Raysh; "I caint hae my church messed up by this yer nonsense," he had grumbled, lamenting the days when he alone adorned the church, and made it look "cheerfuller and more Christmas-like" by sticking a large bough of holly in every pew, till it looked like Birnam wood marching up for devotion instead of retribution.

She had seen Edward and Sibyl skating together the day before, when she drove to the ice to fetch Sibyl home, and had heard people's comments on them with an incredulous ear, but now she was fully enlightened.

She quickly silenced Raysh, and then turned back beneath the dim, cold arches with a singing in her ears, and a fierce, hot surge of passion which surely could not be that dark and dismal thing, jealousy, in her heart, and applied herself with fierce diligence to nailing up the red-berried holly, taking a perverse pleasure in pricking her hands till they bled, and driving in the nails with an energy that made Raysh use strong language when he took them out again. Never had such strange and bitter feelings possessed her before, she did not know herself, surely her guardian angel would not have known her that day. Does it need

but some momentary touch like this, she wondered, to change the current of a character and turn light into darkness? But a few years ago in that very church she had met the summer dawn with such high resolves and feelings so different.

Her companions spoke to her, and she answered them like one who wanders in sleep; the dim and darkening church seemed unreal as the architecture of dreams; its trooping shadows and flickering spots of light oppressed her and added to the confusion which throbbed within and nearly stifled her. Her life seemed to depend on the energy with which she moved and worked; did she but pause an instant to think, she would be undone. And was it truly Sibyl who awakened such anger and scorn in the heart which loved her? And was it true that Alice once actually loved that shallow man, who was filling the measure of his faults by proving a trifler, a light of love, and a traitor?

It was only when she had exhausted her energies and torn her hands in finishing her task that better and more rational feelings came. After all, she mused, might this not be the best thing for both? Sibyl believed in him; who could tell what a purifying and ennobling influence her perfect trust and innocent love might have upon him? Sibyl might still be happy with him, being blind. So she brought herself to think after painful wrestling.

"Sibyl," Edward began without hesitation, when they were alone in the belfry, "we have been friends

for a long time, and you are more dear to me every day, and I think—I hope—you care for me——” here he paused, expecting a reply, which naturally was not forthcoming. “Will you marry me?” he added, in his straightforward fashion.

Sibyl had looked up with her usual frank smile, when he entered, and went on unsuspiciously twining her ivy leaves, but when he spoke, her heart gave a great leap, all the blood flushed up into her face, and the belfry seemed to spin round and shake the great bells above her head. Something rose in her throat and choked her; she grew cold all of a sudden and looked with wistful inquiry into his face, which was earnest and eloquent with warm feeling. Then she looked down, and he waited in vain for her answer, thinking hers one of the sweetest faces that was ever seen, and went on to his downright question, to which she immediately answered “No.”

“No,” he echoed, somewhat taken aback by this plump and plain negative, “and I thought once—that you seemed to care for me.”

Sibyl smiled, and he seemed to see Viola again,

“I am all the daughters of my father’s house,
And yet—I know not.”

“Once,” she said, “I was in love with you. When I was a little, naughty girl. You were such a pretty boy and always hit everything you threw stones at. And you didn’t mind being teased like poor Paul. You should have asked me then.”

"But I had not sense enough then. I know that you believe in me, you told me so once."

"And I will tell you so again if you like to hear it," she replied, in her bright impetuous way.

"Thank you. You are the very sweetest little thing on the face of this perverse earth! But won't you have me? Somehow it strikes me that we should get on well together and make a pleasant-going sort of couple. You scold so charmingly." Then it was that Edward took her hands and looked down, too confidently, into the sweet face, which was tender, sad and playful all at once.

"It strikes me that we shall do nothing of the kind," she replied, withdrawing her hands with some indignation. "You don't love me," she added with a seriousness touched with reproach.

"Indeed I do."

"No, indeed you don't. You love somebody else. You have loved her for years and will love her for ever. And you *ought* to, for she is the dearest creature in the world."

"But she won't have me."

"Won't she? Try again. Wait. She is worth it."

"No, Sibyl, that chapter is closed. It is quite true that I shall never feel again as I did for her, never. But past is past. One can't live backwards. One has to go on. You and I have always been such friends; let us be more. You might make me happy, and I would try to be good to you."

He had taken her hand and led her forth from the darkening chamber beneath the bells, into the warm crimson glow of the frosty sunset, and now they slowly paced the hard footpath among the graves, until they reached the meadow above and beyond the churchyard, where the leafless elms made a fine black tracery on the deep orange sky above them.

"Oh! what tiresome, clumsy, stupid things these men are!" exclaimed Sibyl; "you don't even profess to care for me, you see. Why in the world should you want to marry me, then? You say we are good friends, let us *bide* friends then. A good friend is better than a bad husband, which you would certainly be."

"There is nothing in the world so irritating as a woman," returned Edward, trying hard not to kiss her, and restrained by innate awe of the womanhood in which this guileless spirit was enshrined. "Just think of the comfortable quarrels we might have. As mere friends, the sphere is limited; conventionalities must be observed."

"Is this a theme for jesting?" asked Sibyl, severely. "Oh, I should hate you if I thought you had ceased to love that dear sweet creature! For pity's sake be rational."

"But you began the jesting," he remonstrated, aghast at this charge.

"Well! and I began leaving it off. Good-night. Alice is pricking her sweet fingers with no one to help her."

"Stop, Sibyl, just one word."

Sibyl stopped with an air of resignation. "I am busy, and it's cold," she said plaintively.

"Of course I shall always love her," he said earnestly, "as one loves what is too high and too far-off to reach. But, dearest Sibyl——"

"Then don't tease me any more. Who cares to hear other people made love to?"

"But Sibyl——"

"It should always be done first-hand, and *never* talked about," she added rebukingly.

"But, Sibyl——"

"My name is Rickman. I shall never change it. I am married to my pen——"

"But I wish you could marry me, too."

"You would unwish it in a week. Now listen," said Sibyl, stopping on the crisp grass with sudden gravity. "I like you—far too well to marry you. You fancy you care enough for me to make a passable husband, but it is only friendship. In a week's time you will see that I am right. Be true to yourself, then you will be true to others."

The warm glow of the sunset had burnt away to a pale memory, a mist was floating ghost-like from the level meads beneath them, the Christmas moon had just risen and was filling the earth with a tender dreamy radiance. Sibyl's face in the pale blended lights had a new and unexpected beauty; her rich tints were subdued and the lustre of her dark eyes intensified.

What was the secret charm which so irresistibly drew him to her? It was very different from the deep inevitable and inextinguishable feelings which bound him to Alice. Something told him that Sibyl knew him better than he knew himself, her deep liquid eyes seemed to be gazing into the depths of his soul and discovering recesses closed even to him. What was the secret of her power? Was it genius? His brain was full of lyric snatches from the little volume of poems which had just appeared in Sibyl's name, and they had seemed to his not exigent judgment to have the ring of true song, they had further suggested revelations of Sibyl's own heart. Her earnest glance spoke a thousand unspeakable things, it revealed the guileless soul of a gentle Viola, yet with all its tenderness it scarcely concealed the swift lightnings of a spirit full of mirth. While he gazed, his own spirit began to clear and he saw that she was right. He saw that his feeling for her, though in that moment she had acquired a dear-ness that she never had before, was not one to justify marriage or forbode a happy union. He saw, too, that deeply as he had pressed his love for Alice down into the lowest hold in his heart, he could not stifle it; above all the disappointment, chagrin and resentment, her refusal and want of faith had caused him, and above all more tender and gracious feelings, he had that strong sense of oneness with her, which is only felt once and cannot end. He knew now that the dream Gervase had called into existence was vain, and

that the double life with all its cares and joys and perturbations was not for him, since Alice was beyond reach.

"Dear Sibyl," he said, after a pause, "I think you are one of the sweetest creatures God ever made! I will be true to you, at least. And I think we shall be friends all our lives long."

"I think we shall," replied Sibyl, with a little tender smile. Then they clasped hands and parted.

She went slowly back through the chill silver of the aërial moonbeams, her breath visible in the frosty air, and the frozen grass rebounding stiffly from beneath her light steps, and met Alice and the Mertons coming out of the dark church, the deep blackness of which was still emphasized by a few dim lights. The clear evening sky into which pale stars were slowly stealing, the grey church with its steep red roof and massive tower, the village with its red lighted windows, the bare trees all sleeping in the moonshine, the faces looking unearthly in the bluish light, the associations of Christmas Eve which threw a hallowed glory over all, everything seemed sweet and full of unspeakable charm to Sibyl. The hour she had just passed was the flower of all her life, and she was content; her heart was like a sleeping babe, perfect in its deep sweet repose.

She scarcely heard the "good-nights" of the Mertons when they turned in at their gate, but with her hand in Alice's arm walked silently home, her looks communing with the serene clear heavens. Alice was

quiet too, but it was with a different quietness. They went into the kitchen to see the mummers acting their primitive play from house to house; but Sibyl did not enter into the homely jests as usual; it was as if she had let her spirit pass away with the mystic glories of the twilight and only her body remained. They listened to the carol-singing, and sat round the hall-fire till midnight, but Sibyl said nothing to any one of her twilight ramble. Alice wondered at her silence, and was vaguely pained and disappointed, and when Gervase in bidding her "good-night" pressed her hand lingeringly, she returned the pressure, and was glad to think there was at least one on whom she could absolutely rely, and whose care for her nothing could abate.

CHAPTER IV.

SPIRITS.

ALTHOUGH the one dream which promised brightness to his clouded life had just been dissipated, Edward Annesley drove back to Gledesworth in no despondent frame of mind. The evening sky shone with a holier lustre than usual; his horse seemed to fly like some airborne immortal charger, instead of prosaically trotting over the hard roads. It was as if he had attempted to enter a room full of music and mirth, and had found himself instead in the dim cool spaces of some hoary cathedral, listening to solemn prayer cadences and deep organ thunders.

When he reached home he found a card with a half-forgotten name upon it, "Major McIlvray," and was told that the Major, hearing he would return that evening, had promised to call again on the chance of finding him, which he did.

Major McIlvray's regiment had been sent on foreign service a few months after the death of Paul Annesley, with whom he had become well acquainted after his first introduction to him at the meet at the Traveller's Rest. He had recently returned to England, and was

stationed at a large garrison town, within two hours of Gledesworth, whence he had come that day intending to return before night. At one time Edward Annesley had been in the habit of meeting Major McIlvray constantly, and had been on sufficiently intimate terms with him to find fault with him and turn his foibles into good-humoured ridicule; but he had now become such a solitary, that he scarcely remembered how to welcome friends, and received the Major with a grim coldness that would have discomfited most people, looking at him as much as to say, "What on earth do you want?"

Major McIlvray was not easily rebuffed; he did not appear to notice the coldness of his reception, and sat by the fire with his usual composure, making commonplace observations in the spasmodic drawl which he affected, and secretly studying Edward's face, and comparing him with his former self.

When he heard that he was passing the night at the village inn, Edward asked him to transfer his quarters to Gledesworth, which he at once consented to do, to the surprise of Annesley, who only asked him as a matter of form, a form he had almost forgotten to use, so much of a recluse had he become.

"My mother," said Major McIlvray, "remembers meeting you at some dance at her house. You came up from Aldershot with me. Glad if you would call when in town."

"She is very good. I don't—visit much," he replied.

"Find it a bore? So do I. But do as Romans do."

The blood rushed darkly to Edward's face. McIlvray had not been long in England, he remembered; it was probable that he had heard nothing of the imputation which rested upon him. Yet Lady McIlvray was in the way of hearing it. He relapsed again into the grimness which McIlvray's friendliness had for a moment dissipated, and began to wonder to what he was indebted for this unexpected visit. Presently his guest observed that there were a great many liars in the world. But Edward remembered that David had made a more sweeping observation to the same purpose, and he had himself discovered the fact so early in life as to think it too obvious for comment.

During dinner Major McIlvray said that he had heard so much scandal since his return that he was sick of it. Edward turned hot again and looked fiercely across the table so as to meet the other's eyes. But that other went on tranquilly enjoying his dinner, and spoke of Colonel Disney and other artillery officers whom he had been meeting recently, and of the changes and promotions which had occurred among them.

"Never believe a word I hear," he added with apparent inconsequence, "especially when I know it to be lies."

Annesley asked him point-blank if he had heard any rumours respecting him.

"Heard them all," he replied tranquilly. "Widiculous bosh. Disney an old woman."

This was comforting. Once he had despised McIlvray as a shallow coxcomb full of affectations, redeemed by some good points. Yet he had such solid stuff in him as refused to be turned from belief in a friend.

"Wanted you to leave the service," the Highlander continued. "Wespect you for not giving in."

Yet Annesley's mind misgave him; McIlvray might not have heard all, he too might come to disbelieve in him. He frankly told McIlvray that he was the only man who fully discredited the imputations that were cast upon him, and something in the unexpected loyalty of this undemonstrative *nil admirari* spirit touched him to such an extent, that he let something escape of the bitterness which weighed upon him.

"Soon live it down. Nothing like pluck," McIlvray commented; and after that the evening passed swiftly and pleasantly, such an evening of frank companionship as Annesley had not enjoyed for years.

Whether it was the influence of the genial season, or of that potent national beverage which expands the hearts and stimulates the wits of North Britons, is uncertain, but something effected a transformation in Major McIlvray that Christmas Eve. The enthusiastic Celt emerged from beneath the thin veneer of what for want of a better name may be called the languid swell. In those days the masher was not; the beau, the dandy,

the blood, the buck, and the exquisite had long since passed into shadowy memories; but the swell, the heavy swell, diffused a gracious fragrance upon the air of Piccadilly, and entranced the beholder by the graceful sweep of his whiskers, the calculated curl of his moustache, the slimness of his umbrella, the scantiness of his vocabulary, the immovable gravity of his demeanour, and his impenetrable indifference to all things terrestrial and celestial. He alone among the sons of men attempted to practise the doctrines preached by the garrulous sage of Chelsea on the ineffable beauty of silence, reducing such speech as necessity forced from him to an elegant minimum, and diminishing the necessary occasions of speech still further, by the simple process of not thinking.

Major McIlvray was one of this brotherhood, the lineal descendent of Alcibiades and Agag, a swell of the first water. Though apparently incapable of the rough and virile consonant *r*, to which his tongue imparted the feminine softness of a liquid *w*, this evening the whiskey, or some more ethereal spirit, brought out a fine manly Highland burr in his speech with a fine manly interest in things in general, together with that indescribable imaginative exaltation which is inseparable from the men of the kilt and tartan. His eyes became dreamy, they seemed to gaze at far-off things; the breath of the moor and the loch seemed to sigh through his strongly aspirated speech; he spoke of eerie legends, of haunted corries and pools, of wraiths and apparitions,

and of the strange gift of second-sight. But this point was only reached when they were smoking a final cigar towards midnight and listening for the carol-singers. The less imaginative mind of his host, whose Saxon stolidity was dissipated by no more whiskey than good fellowship demanded, was nevertheless sympathetic to these weird themes to an extent that still further stimulated McIlvray, until a listener might have been beguiled into seeing spectral forms in mist-wreathed tartans, and playing upon shadowy bagpipes, floating by the windows in the silent night, and people of weak nerves would have hesitated to leave that solitary firelit chamber for the lonely, echoing corridors of the great empty house, in which only two or three rooms were now ever occupied. An Annesley in the iron armour of Commonwealth days looked down upon the two men by the fire from his frame on the wall with a sardonic grin, which might have been imagination or the flicker of the leaping fire-light, but which was distinctly perceptible to McIlvray, who asked the history of the grim warrior, and entered with zest into the story of the Gledesworth curse, and was amazed at the present Annesley's proposition of selling it. "I don't suppose it would fetch much," the latter added, "but I should like to get rid of it at any price."

Major McIlvray gazed horror-struck upon him and took some more whiskey; the Cromwellian Annesley seemed to frown darkly, while his hand apparently moved towards the hilt of his great sword.

The living Annesley looked at the fire in silence for a few seconds and then spoke, as one who longs, yet fears, to disburden himself of a secret.

"And you are really convinced that it was your brother's wraith you saw that day when the mist lifted from the hill?" he asked.

"Perfectly. He died at that hour precisely."

Annesley paused again, then he began to narrate what had occurred to him in the previous summer.

It was on the shores of Lake Lemman; he was making an excursion with his sisters and brother from Veytaux to the hills above it. They had walked far, resting at mid-day in a pine-wood; it was now evening, and they were sitting on some broken ground just below the Dent de Jaman, making their evening meal off bread and cheese and thin white wine procured from a chalet near. All were facing the lake, which spread far beneath them, beautiful in the long slanting radiance of the setting sun, above the lake towered the massive pile of the Dent du Midi, its seven snowy peaks rose-red in the sinking light.

"We shall see the *Alpenglühn* to-night," said Sibyl Rickman, who was one of the party; "look at the Midi."

Thus they were all looking, when Annesley became aware of something which made the hair of his flesh stand up.

He was behind the others and on slightly higher ground, thus the falling and passing of a swift shadow

breaking the western sunbeams touched him alone, and he turned and saw—a face. The dark blue eyes burning with inward fire, the black crisp hair, the scar on the cheek were unmistakable, and had not changed apparently since the day he last saw them, the day of Paul Annesley's death.

For it was truly the face of Paul, though clean-shaven, and the head of Paul, though tonsured and rising from the dress of a monk; the long white robe glowing incandescent in the sun's rich light, the passionless features wearing an unearthly calm were those of a monk, yet how should a monk have the dark, blazing, blue eyes and scarred face of Paul Annesley?

Edward Annesley's heart stood still and his mouth grew parched as he gazed, but an instant truly,—for the phantom figure passed swiftly and silently without pause,—yet an instant in which his thoughts were so many and so disquieting that it seemed an eternity. The white figure, after the one brief burning gaze in passing, vanished behind the rocky broken ground; but as soon as Annesley could shake off the nightmare-stiffness which paralysed his limbs, he too disappeared behind the broken mass and saw or thought he saw a ghost-like figure, sinking rapidly down the declivity of the little ravine beneath him, from which the sun had already disappeared. Down the declivity Edward dashed, but the figure was nowhere to be seen, a far-off white streak proved on closer inspection to be a water-fall. A black fir-wood lay in the direction the phantom

had taken; into this Annesley plunged, his blood was up now and he was determined to know the cause of this temporary cheating of the senses. The wood climbed a slope facing the east; it was nearly night there in the thick and heavy shadows. The phantom monk was nowhere to be seen; Edward had now made a long and hot pursuit and the distant *Jodeln* of his brother warned him that there was no time to lose in rejoining his party, whose way lay in the opposite direction and who already bid fair to be belated.

So he was obliged to return, pale and breathless and unable to give a rational account of his sudden flight; for, upon asking the others if they had seen a white monk go by, they laughed and told him he had been dreaming and rallied him unmercifully upon his distraught appearance. He therefore said no more, but descended the hill-side full of disquieting thoughts, and from that moment had never opened his lips upon the subject till now.

"Why should my cousin's spirit appear to me?" he asked Major McIlvray at the close of his narrative. "In all your stories, there was purpose in the apparition—a warning of some kind."

"It was not Paul Annesley's spirit," returned McIlvray with decision.

"Then what was it?" asked Annesley, whose nerves were still quivering from the memories he had just evoked, and who was surprised at the scepticism displayed by so ardent a ghost-seer as Major McIlvray.

"That was very strange that he should come as a monk," replied McIlvray, who, in spite of his scepticism, was excited by the story, "very strange. He was not a Catholic even, why would he appear as a monk? No, Annesley, it was not a spirit, that passing figure. It was a living monk that was passing, and his eyes were dark blue and some mark was on his face, and in that moment he was very like Paul Annesley. I have met a man who was very like me. He was in the Hussars; it was sometimes unpleasant, such mistakes were made. Or, I will tell you; you had been thinking of that poor fellow, your cousin, and a bird was flying past making a shadow, and you turned quickly; the sunshine was dazzling and your imagination painted the face of Paul Annesley on the air. You had been seeing these white Carthusians in France, and you were thinking, it may be, of spirits and white garments, and so you embodied all in one figure of your cousin in a monk's garb. Yes; that is how it would be," he added with an air of conviction as he relighted the cigar, which in his excitement had been suffered to go out, "that is how it would all happen."

The explanation though logical was inconsistent in a man who believed in second-sight and apparitions, and it did not convince the more practical and literal mind of Annesley.

"It was the face of Paul Annesley," he repeated. "His was no common face, and it is beyond possibility that another face should be marked with that peculiar

scar. I am as certain that he looked me face to face that night as I am certain that I am the owner of this house."

McIlvray smiled and looked thoughtfully into the fire for a moment before he spoke. "That is, indeed, being certain," he then said, "I will dispute no more. But it is strange that no one believes like an unbeliever. For you said to-night, that you did not believe in apparitions."

"Or in the curse of Gledesworth," Edward replied with a faint smile. "It is true, McIlvray, that nothing is so consistent as inconsistency."

"Well! I will tell you one thing," continued McIlvray. "If I were in your place I would never speak of this thing again."

"I never shall," he replied, frozen back to his usual reserve by this unexpected incredulity. The last of the final cigars was by this time smoked. The night was wearing on into Christmas morning and they went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE VACANT CHAIR.

ALICE soon heard what had taken place in the twilight of Christmas Eve. The fact that Mrs. Rickman had been told of Edward Annesley's intentions towards her daughter, and that Sibyl had been obliged to confess to her mother that she could not entertain his proposals, was sufficient to ensure Alice's knowledge of the whole history. Mrs. Rickman's nature was transparent and sympathetic; all her innocent thoughts and guileless hopes and fears were shared with those about her, and Alice, upon whom she depended most, enjoyed the most ample share of her confidences. Until Mrs. Rickman had "talked things over" with some sympathetic listener, she was unable to get any firm mental grasp of facts.

"I cannot understand Sibyl," her mother commented to Alice, "she was evidently struck with him from the first. Every one noticed it, and we all thought his visits were for her. Your uncle was thunderstruck when he asked for you, and I have always thought, my dear, and so has Gervase, that some little jealousy or pique occasioned that proposal, especially as you had

never given him the slightest encouragement. There are many things against the match, it is true; but Sibyl is not so young as she was, and she really is very blue, poor dear! Her father and I sadly fear that she will be an old maid. And I cannot help thinking that she cares for him."

"If she did, it would be her secret, not ours," Alice said. "Let us not discuss it; it is not fair. Perhaps it may take place after all," she added, inconsequently, "especially if not talked about."

Gervase's anger was too deep for words when he learnt that Sibyl had deliberately thrown away the chance of happiness that he had so carefully plotted and arranged for her. He was still firmly convinced that no other marriage would be possible to her, and this conviction was confirmed by a carefully guarded conversation he had with her, a conversation in which, as far as words went, she proved more than a match for him. But when people know each other as well as this brother knew his sister, words are but clumsy symbols of thought, especially when associated with such a tell-tale face as Sibyl's, a face upon which the slightest emotion raised a corresponding change of colour and outline. He was angry with Sibyl for thus unexpectedly crossing his purpose, but, of course, he was far more angry with Annesley, and attributed the failure of his suit to some clumsiness on his part.

"These good-looking fools do at least know how to make love commonly," he thought. He even hinted

this want of dexterity vaguely to Alice, who quickly made him see that the subject was not one to which she would permit any reference.

With February came the opening of Parliament, and the fluttering interest of seeing Gervase's name in the debates, all of which Mr. Rickman now read regularly for the first time in his life. Politics now ran high at Arden Manor, although a singular unanimity of party feeling prevailed: no meal was taken without the spice of those magic names, Disraeli, Gladstone and Bright. When Alice went for a few weeks to stay with Mrs. Walter Annesley, and accompany her on a short visit to London, the same political enthusiasm, centring about the same individual, prevailed at her table, and the two ladies one night went to the Ladies' Gallery and were eye-witnesses to the spectacle of Gervase in the act of serving his country. Alice subsequently narrated the details of this moving scene to the hero's parents; told how he sat at ease with folded arms on one of the comfortable benches, and listened to a long debate, sometimes making notes, and sometimes yawning till the tears came into his eyes, and how, when a division occurred, he solemnly went on his own side and did his duty like a man. And somehow the more Gervase was deified by those dear old people, the more warmly did Alice feel towards him, and the more enthusiastic Sibyl waxed upon the political topics which were especially her brother's, the dearer both brother and sister became to her.

Then a great sorrow visited that tranquil hearth; Mrs. Rickman's guileless and simple spirit passed away, after a brief sharp illness.

Hers was one of those unselfish and unsophisticated natures that make little stir and emphasis in life, natures which people take for granted, of the beauty of which they are not conscious until they pass away, leaving a blank that nothing can fill. She always had good health, and her sudden illness, though it surprised every one as an unaccustomed event, caused no alarm in the house, until one night when the doctor said that her son must come immediately if he wished to see her alive. In her last moments she spoke to Alice of Gervase, and said how much she had their marriage at heart, and Alice could but say that she would think of her last wishes, and so give the parting spirit peace.

Almost paralysed by the shock of this bereavement, they sat round the hearth the night after the funeral, and each almost wondered why the familiar figure did not come in and take the accustomed armchair. Mr. Rickman, aged and broken, sat in the opposite chair; Alice was by his side, and Sibyl, exhausted by the tempestuous grief to which she had given free vent, sat on the rug at her feet with her head supported against Alice, who with one hand stroked the daughter's feverish cheek, and with the other fondled the stricken father's hand. Gervase sat by Alice in front of the fire, pale and silent as the others.

Like many an only son, he had graciously and as a

matter of course accepted his mother's affection, which at times had even bored him, and when the final scene occurred, he gave little outward token of grief, beyond one brief cry which seemed torn from him of, "Now she will never know." He made all necessary arrangements with perfect calm, and supported his broken, half-stupefied father through the most trying scenes without once losing his own self-control. Now all was done that could be done, life was about to resume its everyday aspect, he was to leave them the next morning, and there the bereaved family sat, silent with sorrow, and the slow minutes dragged heavily on. Alice tried at first to get them to talk, and started several commonplace topics; but Mr. Rickman seemed too dazed by his trouble, Sibyl too exhausted, and Gervase too full of thought to listen to her, so she desisted, and contented herself with the comfort she knew Mr. Rickman and Sibyl derived from the silent touch of her hands. Her own grief was perhaps as deep as Sibyl's, though more silent, and it pained her a little that the being most dear to the dead, Gervase, was the least affected by her loss. His sphinx-like face, on which she almost feared to gaze at this time, gave no clue to what was passing within, yet she thought that perhaps more sorrow than people suspected was concealed by it, and wondered at the savage suppression men put upon their feelings, whenever they are in the least degree creditable to them.

While she was thus musing, Gervase in his stony

silence had been realizing what his mother was to him and how irretrievable was his loss. Old memories and events of his boyhood had been rising before him, he had almost forgotten the silent companions of his grief, when suddenly, stirred by some unusually poignant recollection, he began to sob with vehemence.

This thrilled through the hearts of the others with pain, not unmixed with a comforting warmth. The old man, whose grief was beyond tears, stirred, sighed, and shook his head; Sibyl sprang up and threw her arms round her brother; Alice felt a stronger movement of the heart towards Gervase in his sudden abandonment to his grief than she had ever felt before; she felt, too, that that moment made her his.

He quickly mastered himself and recovered his usual self-control. Sibyl did the same, and Alice feared to give him the token of sympathy that her heart desired, lest he should again give way. So they sat on in silence as before; yet not quite as before, for each felt a fresh bond in that spasm of common anguish, and presently Gervase left the room in silence, and returned no more that night. The next morning he bid the three good-bye, and though he said nothing, and sought no private interview, he knew by the look in Alice's face that his heart's desire was obtained at last, and went away comforted.

Alice devoted herself to Sibyl and Mr. Rickman, who was too crushed for a long time to take any interest in his scientific pursuits, and only went into his

study to sit idly brooding in his chair. She brought him beetles, plants, and strange stones to no effect, until at last she contrived to purchase a very rare old coin for him.

This roused him, his eyes kindled at the sight of the treasure, which he eagerly took and carefully examined, and Alice was amply rewarded for the pains she had taken to hunt out and buy the coin by hearing him start off in his old familiar fashion on a long and learned lecture on the coin, and the days in which it was struck. The next thing was to get some one to dispute its genuineness, and this with some diplomacy Alice and Sibyl contrived between them; a hot discussion raged, letters were written in antiquarian journals, and finally a long pamphlet was begun.

Then it was that Mr. Rickman began to talk of his loss, a sure sign that the worst sting of it was past; and one day he told Alice that he should not live long, but that his one hope was to see his son happily married and his grandchild born before he died.

Spring days were growing bright, Gervase had written to say he should be at the Manor next day, and Alice fully realized that she must now definitely and irrevocably bind herself.

In the last few years she had deeply pondered the mystery of life, and the ends and aims of human existence, pondered them as the young never do and never can, save under the discipline of heavy sorrow and distracting doubt. Ever since the fateful day of

Paul Annesley's death she had ceased to take everything for granted, and to expect sunshine and mirth as the natural inevitable ingredients of life; she had descended into the hell of suffering and there searched deeply for the few realities which lie hidden under the multiform masks and phantasms which surround eager youth on every side. To earthly happiness she had been called to bid a sorrowful farewell, and having rid herself of that expectation of joy which makes life so complex, she had been free to consider in those silent and dark depths that, after all, life has but one problem to offer, how to do one's duty.

This how had caused her much conflict, conflict continually settled by the urgency of some near and obvious duty, which circumstance presented to her and which she devoutly welcomed. But now that circumstance seemed to offer her one supreme sacrifice, now that a life rich in possibilities needed hers and the decisive moment had arrived, the sacrifice seemed too hard, the secret inmost self revolted against it.

She went into the dim silence of the shadowy church; she looked at the tablet to Paul Annesley's memory; she recalled her vigil in that church, which ended in the rosy summer dawn; she visited her adopted mother's fresh grave. Then she went to the belfry and conjured back the vision of Edward and Sibyl among the Christmas hollies, when Edward had asked Sibyl to be his wife.

This was in the afternoon, and when she returned

from her solitary pilgrimage, Gervase was just arriving. That evening there was joy once more beneath the beloved roof; Gervase and Alice were formally engaged. Mr. Rickman sat by the fire with a satisfied air, contemplating the figure of Alice at the piano accompanying Gervase, who stood near her, on his violin.

Sibyl sat near with clasped hands, and eyes full of tears. She refused to interrupt their music with her own singing; they were playing so exquisitely, she said. And Alice's soul was at peace.

They could not be married for some months, and it was agreed to say nothing of the engagement for the present. They were to live at Arden when not in London, Mr. Rickman and Sibyl remaining with them in separate apartments, which the size of the house permitted, though of course great changes and re-fittings would have to be made. Gervase had virtually retired from legal practice, though his name remained in the firm, and he was bound to see those clients who could not dispense with him. After all, there was not much wrong with human affairs, he reflected. His purposes were in the main being effected. He had his heart's desire; he could bid his soul be merry and take its ease, because much goods were laid up for it, and he heard no deep low voice murmuring in the ear of conscience, "Thou fool!"

CHAPTER VI.

BENEDICTION.

EDWARD ANNESLEY paid one or two visits to Arden Manor in the course of the spring. Those visits did not materially strengthen the hope Sibyl's words had kindled in him at Christmas; yet the hope survived.

One day when he was calling in the summer, he expressed some surprise at the crowd of workmen he saw, and the complete upsetting of the house that was taking place. "I wonder that you stay on in all this turmoil," he said; "why don't you take your father away until the work is finished, Sibyl?"

"We like to see to the new arrangements ourselves," Sibyl replied, not knowing that he had not yet heard of the engagement which all the country side had fully discussed during the last few weeks; for the approaching marriage could no longer be kept secret in the face of these preparations.

"I don't like new arrangements, myself," he added, quite innocently; "I hate a freshly decorated house."

Alice changed colour and rose with an air of vexation to gather a flower; for they were all sitting out of doors to avoid the inconveniences within.

Mr. Rickman hereupon began a long digression upon the passing of one generation and coming of another, made some observations upon marriage customs in various times and places, and said that he thought civilization, while tending to diminish special wedding ceremonies, increased the actual amount of family disturbance involved by a marriage. By this time a hazy notion that somebody was going to be married had penetrated to Edward's brain, but he was not prepared for the shock of Mr. Rickman's final words, "Gervase and Alice are to have the main body of the house, Sibyl and I will be content with the west wing yonder."

Edward looked Alice full in the face with a gaze that stirred her new-born peace to the depths and haunted her long after. All the blood went from his face, leaving it grey and rigid for a moment. Then he looked down at the grass at his feet, speechless; the rest were at a loss what to do or say, until he looked up again with a little sarcastic laugh and apologized for not having offered his congratulations before, observing that the intelligence was quite new to him.

No one enjoyed that scene, and everybody was glad when he rose and took his leave.

"Gervase!" he said to himself, as he walked rapidly down the lane beneath the green elms, "Gervase!" Every time he uttered that clever young lawyer's name he ground his teeth and struck viciously at the innocent cow-parsley on the banks with his riding-whip, and he

uttered it many times, and each time more indignantly than before, on his way from the Manor to the Golden Horse, where his horse was waiting. But why that worthy man should not marry Alice Lingard, if she had a mind to have him, he could not exactly say, nor why he should have a dim sense of having been outwitted, befooled, and cheated by that thoughtful and resolute person.

Many memories now appeared in a new light and made him uncomfortable; the remembrance of Gervase's strong assertions that Alice would never recover from Paul's loss, of his assurances that hers was not a nature to forget, that it was a kind of insult to Paul's memory to think of marrying her, the remembrance of those proceedings on Gervase's part which had led him to offer himself to Sibyl and be rejected. These and many other circumstances, and particularly a remark of Major McIlvray's made at Christmas to the effect that Rickman intended from the first to marry Alice, stirred the most hateful feelings within him, feelings which he could not easily dismiss.

After all, was it Gervase's fault if neither of the ladies of Arden Manor would accept him? Was Gervase to be censured for paying court to the sweetest of women whom he was constantly seeing, when he knew that she had definitely rejected him, Edward Annesley? Yet he was indignant with Alice for choosing Rickman; though he could give no reason why she should not. Most people would say that Rickman was the better

match, but all the same he could not admire her taste.

Feeling betrayed and deserted, relieving his mind by recalling all the severe and sarcastic sentences he had read or heard of the frailty and fickleness of women, and blaming even Sibyl in his haste for the false hopes she had rekindled in him, he put his horse into a canter and then got him on the short down-turf, and let him have his head until the downs were passed and the horse completely blown.

Then when the horse walked listlessly with hanging head through the park, he reflected that Alice's marriage was the only remedy, bitter though it was, for the state into which he had fallen; now finally he should be cured once for all of his unfortunate attachment.

That day he left Gledesworth, and, a few weeks later, England, to join his family on a tour through the north of France.

"I really think Edward gets grimmer and grimmer," his sister Eleanor observed one day, during this tour; "I wish he would remember that other people want to be happy if he doesn't."

"Poor fellow! he has had more trouble than you think, Nellie, don't be hard upon him," her mother replied, "and he does everything he can to give us pleasure."

"That is just what I complain of," replied his sister, "he never indulges in an original wish. It is always 'Just where you like, Nell,' with a sort of martyred

resignation, or 'Well then, we will go to Rouen, I have no choice,' and one may change one's mind eight times in a minute without making him lose his temper. I could box his ears sometimes. How I should hate to be married to a man of such maddening good-temper!"

"Major McIlvray is certainly very different," said Harriet, in her guileless way. "Do you remember how he persisted in going to St. Peter's last Easter Day, and would have gone without us if we had not given in."

"Oh, yes! Major McIlvray," replied Eleanor, blushing in spite of her disdainful air, "his head was quite turned on the subject of monks. He never saw one during the whole of his stay in Rome without turning to look at him. The functions he went to for the sake of studying his beloved monks! He was quite rude on one occasion."

"McIlvray rude, Nell?" asked Edward, coming into the room; "you must have snubbed him very severely. A worm will turn sometimes."

"Well! he *was* rude. He left us in a shop one day when a procession was going by. He rushed out, saying something about a monk with a scar on his face, and did not return until we had finished our shopping and gone home alone."

"And what did he say about this monk?" asked Edward.

"Oh, nothing. He had made a mistake, or some

rubbish. Come, Ted, do propose something for this afternoon."

"Well!" he replied, with a pre-occupied air, "would you like to go to church?"

"To that sweet old church we passed yesterday? Why not? Is there any service?"

"Yes, the landlady tells me there will be vespers at four and a sermon. She cannot say what kind of preacher, because the *cure* is ill and a stranger is taking his place. The choir, she tells me, is heavenly. Her son Armand sings in it, which no doubt accounts for its excellence."

"You are becoming almost cynical, Ned; it is quite refreshing. Who is for church then? We three? I am ready."

"So am I," said the younger sister, and they started and strolled along the village street in the hot August afternoon, keeping well under the shade of the houses and trees.

When they reached the little old church, Edward said that if his sisters did not mind he would wait for them outside, he did not feel in the right frame of mind for a sermon. Sometimes a very little thing inspires one with a strong and unreasonable repugnance; such a repugnance he felt at entering the dark, cool little church, into which the more devout villagers were passing by twos and threes. Was he growing whimsical in his gloom, he wondered; what difference could an hour spent in a church make one way or the other to him?

So his sisters went in alone, and, leaving the churchyard, he strolled up the hillside on which the church was built and found a shady seat under a pear-tree, whence he could see the low-lying village with its pointed red roofs, and the old church with its red-tiled spire above it. Below this rising ground was a broad level country with long lines of poplars marking the high road, and a tranquil river winding placidly through the unfenced fields, where the corn stood yellowing for the sickle, and cattle pastured, and the strong oxen rested from their toil. Music came faintly from a holiday-boat on the river and the voices of loungers in Sunday dress were heard now and then in a snatch of song or burst of laughter from below, otherwise the silence of August brooded over the wide sunny land—even the church-bell was still.

The level country through which the blue river flowed so peacefully, stretched away and away into infinite distance, till its vague blueness melted into the deep azure of the cloudless sky. The dreamy fascination of the broad unvaried levels is something like the stronger charm of the wide sea, and the silence of the plains awes the listener, though in a different manner, as the unceasing music of the waves does; both conduce to reverie, and suggest far-off thoughts. Half an hour quickly passed away in the charmed silence, which was scarcely interrupted by the organ-music and chanting of vespers rising, hushed by distance, from the church, and many thoughts passed through Edward's

mind as he sat alone in the leafy shade. If Alice had married Paul he could have borne it, for she loved him; but the idea of the marriage with Gervase was insupportable; her face, as he had last seen it that summer day at Arden, haunted him; it was not that of a happy bride. Why had she accepted "that fellow?" There was some mystery which he could never hope to fathom. Everything was going wrong, he thought.

Wherever he had come in contact with other lives he had brought trouble; he had deprived Alice of the lover of her youth, and she had drifted into this loveless marriage which promised no joy. In moments of despondence, the thought of Paul's fate was wont to sting him with a keen reproach. The outward reproach was more painful to one of his frank, open-hearted nature than any one suspected, but that which continually recurred within, the feeling of having caused the death of one bound to him by so many ties, was far worse. He did not yield to it; he was not one to waste strength over what could not be altered, but there were times when the sense of being overshadowed by some malign influence against which nothing availed oppressed him, and almost made him believe in the Gledesworth curse. At such times he saw the face of his aunt, her cold eyes alight with anger, when she pronounced the double curse upon him, and only with stout striving could he shake off this waking nightmare. To-day was such a time of weakness, of painful memories and despondent forecasts. If only the dead

could return, if he could but see Paul Annesley alive once more, he thought with a desperate yearning, for the futility of which he scorned himself.

But brooding over the irrevocable was as useless as it was weak, so he rose and went back to the church, where, as he supposed, some good man was trying to show people the way to walk through this dark and devious world. But the sermon was over, and the music told him that Benediction had begun.

It was refreshing to dip the finger into the holy-water stoup, and to change the broad blaze of sunshine without for the cool shadows within, where the soft mellow music rose and floated through the incense-laden air. He stole noiselessly in, and took up his station near the entrance by a massive pillar cool to the touch, and listened to the subdued singing of the "Salutaris Hostia." When he raised his head and glanced over the church, all was at first dark to his sun-dazzled eyes, as religion is to people blinded by the fierce glare of worldliness. Gradually he made out the forms of women in great white caps, children, a man in blouse and sabots, a bourgeoisie or two, the slim figures of his sisters, fair-haired and conspicuous in fresh white dresses. Some stray sunbeams here and there shot a long thick-moted shaft across nave and chancel, on the high altar the golden vessel containing the Host glittered unveiled. How like and how unlike it was to a village church at home! How like and how unlike were the rustic worshippers, people who

toiled much and had many sorrows and fears and more happiness than they knew, to whom creeds were little, and true religion much, people who were there from habit and in deference to public opinion, or who sought in the quiet and consecrated place balm for bitter sorrow and guidance in dire perplexities! Thus far the English villagers and the French were alike, they only differed outwardly and in their way of expressing these things. And the priest? He could not see this priest's face in the gloom; he would differ from the English country parson more widely than the rural parishioners of both nations differed from each other.

A second motet began, and fell with a healing charm upon Edward's soothed ears; good thoughts came into his mind, vague aspirations after a better life. Stern Protestant though he was, he acknowledged that this sacred singing of hymns in an unknown tongue might lift up the heart, and be better than nothing. Then came the final hymn, incense floated, the priest, mounting a ladder and taking the Sacrament in his hands, faced the people in the act of benediction; the solemn moment had arrived and all bowed down.

"The shrill bell rings, the censer swings,
And solemn chants resound between."

But Edward, while he knelt, looked up full in the face of the priest; a face calm with the unearthly calm of the cloister, yet marked with the traces of past storm; a remarkable face, in which the inextinguishable fire of the eyes belied the unnatural stillness of the

features; a face in the summer of life, crowned with dark hair and scarred; a face seldom absent from the gazer's memory—the face of Paul Annesley.

The church seemed to swim in a flood of lurid light; the figure of the priest to shudder away as figures do in dreams; all became vague save the burning radiance of the deep-blue eyes, and the golden vessel making the sign of the cross in the trembling hands. The chanting of the choir sounded faint and strange, pierced as it was by the silver sound of the bell; the incense seemed to intoxicate and overwhelm; everything came to a blank void for a time, and then all was natural again, and with a clear gaze, though with a heavily-throbbing heart, Edward saw in the calm features of the priest in the act of benediction, the familiar face he had last seen ablaze with passion, and hungry for his life.

He was quite sure, soberly certain. Those tremulous hands now blessing the people with the holy Sacrament were the same then laid with murderous purpose upon him. Those eyes, with the startled, pained, intent gaze into his, were the same which glowed upon him then with blind fury. He who had been dead was alive again, standing before him: no phantom, for never phantom gazed with such human pain, but a living, breathing, suffering man.

PART VI.

PART IV

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BRINK.

THE tyrant Time, who wastes and destroys so relentlessly in his flight, whose swift onrush no power may stay, when once past becomes the slave of thought and imagination. The chronicler bids him advance and retire at will; he waves his magic rod and it is no more the hour of Benediction in the little French village. Five years roll back, and Paul Annesley, having left his friends at the river's source, is speeding down the hilly path like one chased by demons.

He was in such a tempest of confused passion on that day that he scarcely knew what he was doing; as men are drunk with excess of wine, so was he drunk with the excess into which unchecked passions always run more or less. He had never tried to bridle himself; he could not do so now; the evil in him had grown to such mastering might. As men drunk with wine can give no clear account of their actions when sobered, so it was with him. He never knew afterwards precisely why he left the party of friends at the spring,

or what had been his exact purpose in following the downward path in such hot haste; he could only recall, as one recalls the incidents in a dreadful dream, a chaos of fierce despair within him, lighted as by a flash of fire by the cheery sound of a man's voice singing in the careless gaiety of a heart at ease—

“There we lay, all the day,
In the Bay of Biscay O.”

The blithe singing kindled a dreadful impulse in his heart and stimulated his mind to unnatural activity. It made him remember the nature of the ground lower down. Something whispered to him not to overtake the singer, but to dash with silent swiftness into the wood and wait hidden beneath the trees, where the slope of the ground, steeply descending to the path on the broken brink of the rocky scarp, gave an advantage in a sudden attack. A grim voice told him that no one would know, the path was so slippery with moss and so broken at the verge. They had marked the spot in their upward course in the morning, and said how easily an accident might occur—a false step, a fit of abstraction, then a dash on the rocks below, and thence into the deep green river. There could be no afterwards, as was said of the prisoners in the Bastille.

He had not long to wait beneath the sighing pines; the object of his fierce passion drew nearer, tracked by his snatch of careless song, and suspecting nothing. The light-hearted singing stung the silent listener to

keener purpose. The song ceased suddenly, when Paul sprang tiger-like from the bank upon his prey, and with the impetus given by the spring added to the strong pushing of his arms, tried to hurl him into the depths below.

But Edward, though caught unawares, was taller than his cousin and stronger, his bodily powers were better trained, and he grappled at once with his unexpected adversary, whom he had not time to recognise, though his breath was hot upon his face; but his words revealed him—words which Paul forgot as soon as uttered, but Edward never.

The struggle was no light one. The strength of unbridled fury was pitted against the instinct of self-preservation; it seemed as if the terrible embrace could never end but in the death of both cousins. At last in the dreadful whirl Edward succeeded in flinging his cousin from him, in what direction he could not tell, and in the rebound he fell himself backwards, striking his head against the rocky ground and losing consciousness.

Paul went over the brink, grasping with wild instinct at the air, and blindly catching the birchen bough which hung over the river, projecting far from the rocky wall.

The shock of his rapid descent and the immediate peril which he faced, checked the fierce current of his fury and restored him to the self-consciousness which passion of any kind abnegates; and then ensued a mo-

ment, the keenest and most terrible that can come to mortal man—the moment in which the veil of passion and prejudice is lifted from the eyes of the soul, and all things stand naked and clear as in the searching gaze of the Judge of all men.

The bough, quivering beneath his weight, bounded and rebounded like some fearful balance between heaven and earth, nay, between heaven and a yawning hungry hell; every bound threw him wildly in the air, loosened the grasp of his clinging hands, and threatened to hurl him into the depths below: but one more bound and he must go; the fate which he had prepared for another had overtaken himself. He knew by the agony with which his strong young life shrank from its sudden and violent extinction, how dreadful was the crime he had meditated against that other young life kindred to his own.

At supreme moments like these, Eternity asserts itself, the shadow, Time, practically ceases, and the thoughts and experiences of a lifetime crowd into one brief moment by the clock. All Paul Annesley's life rose before him during one rebound of the slight spring which held him suspended above certain death. A flash of wild remorse lighted the deepest recesses of his soul; only to unlive the recent past he would have given all that went before had that been possible. A few minutes before, life had seemed so bitter that death was a coveted boon; but now, in the near view of death's grim face, life had an unspeakable sweet-

ness; his vigorous vitality revolted against dissolution, his soul shuddered at a hereafter vague with retribution, and he, who did not pray before, sent up a wild cry to Heaven for help. Then it was that his agonized gaze caught the face of Gervase Rickman looking down upon him, and he heard his voice entreating him to hold on a little longer.

But no entreaty could stay the slipping of the boughs through his burning hands; help must come at once if he was to be saved. One more vibration of the over-strained spring on which he was poised, sent him upwards, and the downward rebound was so strong that the bough cracked with a shock that jerked his now tremulous hands from their strained clinging; he felt the sliding of the last twigs through his bleeding palms, a wild whirl and the shock of water smiting his body as he met it lengthwise, then the end, darkness, and with it calm.

The silent darkness could not have lasted long, for when life returned to him, he found himself drifting face upwards upon the surface towards the French shore; the current had carried him past the little promontory beneath the spot where he fell; stiff, bruised and dazed though he was, he struck out instinctively, though he could not swim, and kept himself up till he saw some overhanging sallow branches, grasping at which, he pulled himself out of the rapid current on to a shelving shore, which made a little ledge at the foot of the precipitous cliffs.

He drew himself up under the sallow bushes and sought in his pockets for brandy, which he carried for the benefit of the excursion party. His handkerchief fell out as he did this, and, a thought striking him, he threw it into the stream, which carried it farther down, where it was afterwards found, together with a guide-book inscribed with his name.

The brandy revived him, and he presently found that he was uninjured, though bruised and strained; falling, as he did, into the centre of the stream, he had escaped rocks. He remembered now that Edward had fallen in the opposite direction to himself, and was no doubt safe, and then he took the decision from which he never afterwards swerved. He had appeared to die before the eyes of Gervase Rickman, he was virtually dead, and it was best so; there was no occasion for him to come to life again.

After resting a while under the bushes, which effectually concealed him from the searchers, he found that the little ledge upon which he landed led up to a broken cleft in the cliff, scarcely large enough to be called a gorge, but sufficiently marked to form a rude ascent, up which he climbed. Having reached the summit, he struck across the mountainous country at right angles to the river. In those remote places, nothing human was to be seen, save one or two peasants at work or guarding flocks, and these he carefully avoided, like the fugitive he was. So he stole cautiously along until the thunderstorm broke and the deluge of

rain which descended made his soaked clothes appear natural and the loss of his hat nothing unusual.

The fury of the Alpine storm was as nothing to him after the spiritual cataclysm through which he had passed; he walked on bare-headed beneath the awful splendour of the jagged lightnings and the rushes of rain: now the heavens opened above him and let down sheets of blue and purple flame, discovering vast mountain prospects and the distant plains of France in their lurid glare; now the deafening crack and roar of the thunder, which rolled round him and crashed among the hills till they seemed to rock and split in the agonizing shock, reached his ears; then the flood of rain on the ground blazed like molten metal beneath his feet, and chains and forks of fire flashed before him; then came a crash, which made the solid earth shake beneath him and the mountains shudder above. He scarcely heeded the majesty and terror of the spectacle, but walked on in a dazed despair, with no aim but the vague one of escaping from the past and cutting himself off from the memory of living men. In the apathy of exhaustion which succeeded overstrained feelings he scarcely heeded the tongue of fire which with a hissing sound split a tree a little in advance of him. The tree, green a moment before, was black and charred when he passed beneath it. But afterwards, it seemed little short of a miracle that he had not been struck, as he must have been had he passed it a few minutes earlier.

When the storm abated he reached a little lonely farm, and there took shelter.

As a storm-driven tourist, his appearance excited no surprise, and having had his clothes dried and cleansed to some extent, he procured a straw hat from the farmer and set forward again after supper.

"Que Dieu vous accompagne, Monsieur," said the farmer, in reply to his farewell, and the pious greeting touched his troubled heart.

Does God accompany murderers? he asked himself, as he dragged his weary limbs aimlessly onwards, followed by the demons of remorse and despair.

The farmer had taken him for a Frenchman, his accent was so pure and his idiom so ready; he thought it would be well if others did the same, because as a Frenchman he could more easily conceal himself.

Night was falling by this time, and large lustrous stars were looking pensively from the clear sky. They seemed to his shaken spirit to be accusing him. His way lay across a hilly region, and in his mental pre-occupation the farmer's clear directions for the *bourgade* at which he meant to pass the night became confused, and he took the wrong path, keeping westward nevertheless, by the aid of stars and a pocket compass on his watch-chain.

While trudging wearily and doggedly on, as if fleeing from an invisible spirit of justice, he remembered with a sort of rapture that he had not killed his cousin

after all, and his heart rose to Heaven in silent unutterable thanksgiving. It was possible to live now that his hands, though not his soul, were clean of the awful stain of murder; in the other case neither life nor death would have been endurable; there would have been no way to fly, as he had realized when poised on that awful balance, "infinite wrath and infinite despair." Doubtless a merciful Power ruled the destinies of men, and to him, Paul Annesley, had shown a mercy beyond the ordinary working of natural laws, had miraculously rescued both soul and body from the pit of hell.

Deep and solemn thoughts moved dove-like upon the troubled waters of his soul and wrought peace and order in those chaotic depths. The stars shone in increasing multitudes above him; it was long past midnight, his limbs dragged more heavily, neither town nor village was within sight. The air was chill, the ground soaked; he could not lie down in the open. Presently he found a rude shed within a wood, a shelter for charcoal-burners or wood-cutters. Beneath the rough roof it was fairly dry and partly littered with bracken. Here he lay down and slept a dreamless sleep till the crimson morning looked in and touched his eyes.

Then he waked, and wondered at the beauty of the long crimson shafts that shivered upon the tree-trunks, the mystic peace which rested on the unstirred leaves, the fresh radiance of the dew, the glory and the purity of the hour when the new-born day springs forth in its eternal youth. He enjoyed the splendour only for a

moment; the sight of the rough boards of his unwonted sleeping-chamber called him back to the bitterness of life.

To wake to a new sorrow is bitter, but to wake to a new sin, worse. *They* were doubtless sleeping, he thought, and when they woke would think of him as one dead, and as such would draw a pitying veil over his frailties. He could now think of Alice as Edward's wife without pain; his wild passion was swept away in the torrent of spiritual anguish. Ever since the day on the lake with Alice, he had felt, though not acknowledged, something more bitter than the fact that she loved Edward—the fact that she must always despise him, that pity must henceforth be the softest feeling he could expect from her; her presence had become agony to him, though he clung to it with a strange persistence. He did not like to think of the mother he was leaving childless, but deep down in his inmost heart the memory of the home she had made so miserable spoke strongly against the chance of going back to live with her, and helped to persuade him, together with his disgust of life, that it was but a just atonement to Edward to seem to die that his cousin might have his inheritance.

The morning air was sharp, and called him unrested from his temporary shelter. He walked on till he reached a cottage, and asked his way to a village, where he found food and rested till afternoon.

He was very stiff and weary, though scarcely conscious of bodily sensations in his inward distress; he

walked on, nevertheless, choosing by-ways and unfrequented districts, avoiding railways and high-roads, thinking thus to escape the chance of recognition.

No distinct plan had yet formed itself in his mind; he had only a vague desire to flee away and be at rest, a dim hope that continual bodily movement would quiet his inward fever. He walked on, therefore, in spite of increasing fatigue and pains, till night, rested in a village inn, and rose unrefreshed next morning to continue his way.

It was Sunday morning; the September sun was shining warmly on the ripening grapes in the vineyards on the sunny slopes of that hilly region in the Vosges; the sedate tinkle of church bells was heard in the stillness; now a troop of pretty maidens and prematurely aged matrons were going to some village church; now a pleasure-party, in an odd clumsy vehicle, half cart, half carriage, was jogging along the dusty causeway to a neighbouring farm or hamlet; every creature, human or otherwise, seemed gay and innocent, only he was out of tune, an anomaly in a bright world.

He reached a pretty hamlet among the vineyards in a fold of the hills; it was now very hot, a heavy languor was creeping over him, and, seeing the church door open as if to invite him, he went in. The music was not beautiful, but it soothed him, together with the shade and coolness; he scarcely noticed that the choir sang through their noses, nor did the rest of the congregation,

Religion was a subject to which Paul Annesley had given little attention. He did not like the very pronounced specimen his mother affected; it appeared to act as a stimulant upon all the least agreeable elements in her character; it had struck him very early in life that she was always most religious when most vile-tempered, that she contemplated with evident enjoyment the future reprobation of all those who differed from her. His French school was conducted by a Protestant, and French Protestantism is not a seductive religion, especially to the young. Paul often thought that there might after all have been some excuse for St. Bartholomew's Eve, if the Huguenots of those days resembled the Calvinists of his.

But his religious instincts were all awake and quivering with painful vitality to-day, and when the priest began his simple sermon, he was listening with hungry eagerness for some clue to the maze of misery in which his life was involved. Though he scarcely heard what the old priest said in his pure and simple French to his "children," something in his way of saying it and something in his face convinced him that here was one who had found a clue to the mystery of life. A simple kindly life such as this priest's would be a sweet and restful thing, he thought.

But when the office was ended, and he found himself again in the open air, sitting on the low wall of a vineyard a stone's throw from the church, idly watching the bright-eyed lizards darting over the stones in the

sun, something the gentle old priest had said seemed to illuminate his past life. "Lose thyself and find Me," a sentence from an old book Paul had never read, an echo from a still older book he had read, quoted by the preacher, kept repeating itself in his brain.

The pendulum of his mind, thus strongly touched, swung to the other extreme, and with all the intensity of his nature he yearned to sacrifice himself as unreservedly as he had once striven to please himself.

While he was thus musing, the *cure* approached him, a tall, bent, white-haired figure in black cassock and broad hat, and stopped on his leisurely way to the presbytery, not unwilling to have a little chat with a stranger, a pleasure seldom enjoyed in that remote hamlet. He had seen the troubled, passion-worn face among the well-known faces of his little flock, and something in the strained wide gaze had touched him. Here, he thought, was a man acquainted with sorrow, that strange birthright of humanity.

Paul, replying to his salutation, raised his eyes from the lizards and looked into a venerable and kindly face, lined with years and care, but peaceful and sweet, and felt a growing confidence in him.

Monsieur was tired, the priest surmised, after a few words had been exchanged; the day was hot; would he come into the presbytery and rest awhile in the cool?

Monsieur was glad to do so, and soon found himself strolling slowly by the side of his new acquaintance

through the narrow lane between the vineyards towards the presbytery, a white house with green venetian shutters, and shaded in front by a great walnut-tree.

CHAPTER II.

BURIED ALIVE.

THE interior of the presbytery was very cool and clean and bare; Paul was glad to sink into a wooden elbow-chair by the window, on the sill of which was coiled the one spoiled and pampered Sybarite of the establishment, a great white Angora cat, equally idolized by the *curé* and his housekeeper, Mlle. Françoise, who was clattering about the bare brick floor laying the cloth for dinner.

She was extremely glad to see Monsieur, she said in her high shrill voice, it was pleasant for M. le Curé to see a new face sometimes. It was a most fortunate thing that he was not dining at the château to-day, and still more fortunate that she had killed a fowl; that was doubtless the inspiration of some saint.

Monsieur Paul was duly grateful for her hospitable intentions, and acknowledged the skilful cooking of the omelette added to the festal Sunday dinner expressly for him; yet he so troubled his host by the injustice he did to the good fare set before him, that he was obliged to apologize for his want of appetite, saying that he

was unwell. Nevertheless, good manners, with the aid of a potent home-made cordial which Father André administered to him, enabled him to rouse himself to an interesting conversation, in the course of which Paul discovered that, besides speaking a purer French than most rustic clergy, his host had evidently seen something of the world, and was both well-read and well-bred. His bright dark eyes looked into the world with a pensive cheerfulness, his features were finely cut, and the long white hair flowing beneath his skull-cap finished a pleasing and venerable aspect.

Paul's black beard, at that time an unusual ornament on an English face, his crisp curly hair, his dark-blue eyes and his fluent Parisian French were all compatible with his host's supposition that he was a Frenchman; though his conversation occasionally suggested points of view distinctly foreign. The fact of his being on a walking tour further pointed to a foreign extraction or education.

After dinner, they adjourned to the garden, where Françoise had placed wine and fruit on a table beneath the great walnut-tree, and whence they could see the hamlet dotted about the hill-slope amid vineyards and orchards. "They are so good," Father André said, meaning his parishioners, "poor children, their troubles are great. Next week we have a wedding; a good brave girl in that cottage yonder by the plane-tree, who supported her widowed mother for years, is to marry a nice lad from a farm a few miles above in the moun-

tains. I shall miss the dear child; yes, I shall miss her."

"You will still have a large family," Paul commented, a little moved by this, to him, novel way of disposing of domestic feelings.

"Yes, yes, but I shall regret Madeleine," he replied, and then he rose and apologized for leaving his guest while he went to see one of the "children," who was sick.

He did not return until after vespers, when he found Paul, who had been dozing heavily since his departure, very ill, too ill to move. He was helped to bed, where he remained for weeks; carefully nursed by the priest and his housekeeper, both of whom would have thought it criminal to send him elsewhere or to trust him to other hands, while they could tend him.

Next morning, after a night of fierce pain, Paul, finding that he had rheumatic fever, desired Françoise to give him his clothes, from the pockets of which he took such papers and letters as gave any clue to his identity, and, tearing them with difficulty, bid the housekeeper burn them on the hearth before his eyes. Having seen this done, he became delirious.

"The good God has indeed sent us a guest, Françoise," said her master, on entering the room shortly after and looking upon this spectacle, "poor fellow! He is no doubt a good Catholic, though a foreigner; I was struck by his devout air yesterday. And he is in trouble."

"But his hands, Monsieur le Curé," returned Françoise, pointing them out. "And what terrible language is he speaking?"

It was the bloody mark of his torn hand on the white home-spun coverlet which had set the patient raving a few minutes before, and now he was pointing at it, and crying out about Cain and his ineffaceable brand in a way which would have chilled his listeners' blood had they not been ignorant of English.

"He hurt his hands in climbing; he wore gloves over some kind of dressing yesterday," replied the *curé*, bidding Françoise remove the stained sheet and bind up the hands. Then he did what Paul had foreseen, turned out his pockets in search of his name and address that he might communicate with his friends, and found nothing but a pocket-book full of gold and notes, a well-filled purse and some jewels of price which he put aside in a safe place.

In his lucid intervals Paul knew how severe his illness was, yet he did not think he should die, much as he now wished for death. For since he had twice been miraculously preserved, there was no doubt some purpose to be fulfilled in his life. Perhaps only the purpose of expiation. God's mark was upon him as upon Cain, so that none could slay him; he was doomed to live.

But as he grew better, he began to form schemes for turning the life of which he was so weary to some useful purpose, and when the doctor told him one

morning that all danger was past and time and good nursing alone could now help him, he, knowing well what illness like his leaves in its track, faced the probability of becoming a cripple, a condition which, throwing him eventually upon charity for support, might lead to the discovery he feared.

As soon as he could hold a pen he wrote to Captain McIlvray, one of those Highland officers whose expensive amusements had so nearly ruined him in the days of his poverty, and pledging him to secrecy, explained that civilized life had become insupportable to him, and that, wishing to break completely from all past connections, he had taken advantage of an accident to disappear. McIlvray had lost money to him on the eve of his Swiss journey, and not having means of payment at hand, had given him his acceptance at a few months' date. Paul therefore desired him to forward this sum, with a hundred pounds more; and, as McIlvray's bill would be found among his effects and presented for payment, he gave him papers for the whole amount dated before his supposed death, so that McIlvray could claim payment of the balance due to him from the executors.

Captain McIlvray, being just then under orders to go to India, had little time to spend on other people's affairs, and he did not feel called upon to prevent Paul Annesley's virtual suicide. The money therefore safely reached the hands of Father André, together with a letter to Paul, in which McIlvray ventured upon a brief

remonstrance with him. Thus, with Mrs. Annesley's diamonds and a valuable ring intended for Alice, Paul was in possession of over a thousand pounds, sufficient to keep him from want.

He spent many weeks of acute pain and heavy sickness in the little clean bare guest-chamber of the presbytery, seeing nothing but the sky through the white-curtained window, the crucifix in black and ivory on the white wall, the wood-fire crackling on the hearth, and four figures which changed and melted into one another like figures in a dream; the doctor feeling his pulse and talking in a low voice, but not to him; Françoise in her white cap and sabots, and a kind of phantom Françoise with a different nose and stouter figure, who proved to be Pauline, her married sister; and the *curé*, clad in a rusty black cassock, with his grey locks beneath his skull-cap.

The latter knelt by his bedside by the hour, praying aloud in a low monotonous voice, very soothing to the patient, who looked at him with the long wondering gaze with which an infant's eyes follow its mother's movements. The women also varied their ministrations, especially at night, by telling their beads aloud; but their prayers sounded more business-like than the Father's, and it became a sort of occupation to the patient to speculate upon the slipping of the beads through their fingers in a given time.

When he was able at last to sit up, propped with cushions at the open window, it was warm, still October

weather, and the country was full of the cheery sounds of the vintage. He could see the vintagers at work on the sunny slopes, men, women and children all busy and happy, singing and laughing from morning till night. The *cure*, with his cassock tucked up, was busy in his own little vineyard; Françoise, with the ubiquity and ceaseless industry of which only French women are capable, was out gathering and carrying great baskets of ripe grapes, the choicest clusters of which found their way to the sick room. Paul, in his languor, thought he would like to live this peaceful life for ever.

Yet Father André found time to read to his patient and talk to him, by some mysterious process, aided by one or two broken hints from the evidently suffering man, discovered much of what was passing in his mind. Paul, sundered by the strange mental experiences of sickness, in which weeks have the effect of years, from his past life and all its affections, and feeling born again into a different world, clung to his gentle host with the dependent reverent affection of a child; the priest on his part loved the younger man, as only those cut off from natural ties can love strangers, and the two looked at each other often in silent moments, wondering at the bond which was being formed between them and at the experiences which had brought each to that remote village presbytery so far from the original sphere of either. Thus the *cure's* conversation, which was more interesting and less tiring to his patient than

reading, gradually became of a more personal nature and full of anecdotes.

"It seems, Monsieur, that you were not bred a priest?" Paul said one day, after one of these narrations.

"It is true," he replied, looking quickly up and then down again; "would it be tiresome to listen?"

Paul replied that it would interest him above all things.

"Because," observed M. André, taking a pinch of stuff and seating himself on a stone near the patient's chair, which was placed in a sunny sheltered nook in the garden, "I have sometimes permitted myself the liberty of thinking that a sorrow like mine may have befallen you. Pardon me if I am mistaken."

His name, he continued, was Armand de Fontigny, a name of historic fame, as Paul knew. His education was not austere; though a Catholic, he looked upon religion merely as a thing it was among the family traditions to respect. His youth was as gay as rank, wealth, good looks and good health could make it, in the gayest city of the world; but, though devoted to pleasure, he was not vicious; he only wished to be thought so.

He became assiduous in his attentions to the wife of a friend. He did not love her, he did not think that she loved him, but the vanity of each was gratified by the idea of a conquest over the other.

The husband was unsuspecting, until one day when some report reached his ears. That night De Fontigny

met the lady at a masked ball. It was carnival time; the now suspicious husband was there also, and followed them about masked, until he had no doubt of their identity. Then he shot the lady dead.

This shot, as he learnt during the official enquiry upon the death, was intended for her supposed lover.

She fell at De Fontigny's feet, his face and clothing were splashed with her blood. A second shot followed—the man had turned his weapon upon himself. De Fontigny stood among the masqueraders in the brilliance of the ball-room, his ears ringing with the sounds of the two shots, motionless with horror, while the dancing broke up in wild tumult and the blood of his two victims stained the parquet.

Father André paused, trembled, and with an apology left his guest. He did not conclude his narrative till next day, when he spoke of his misery and remorse, his disgust with follies which had resulted in such tragedy, his flight to the cloister, and its calm round of prayer and toil, which, though it at first soothed him, did not suffice him. He longed for activity and usefulness, and after having been sent out on one or two occasions to take the place of some sick parish priest, was appointed to this little parish of Rémy, where, as Paul saw, his life was a course of labour, prayer and service to his parishioners, of whom he was truly the father.

“And have you found happiness?” his listener asked, at the close of the narrative.

"Not happiness, my dear son; that is not of this world, but healing and peace."

Paul looked up with moist eyes at the lined and pensive face before him, and his decision was taken.

He told his kind friend his whole history from beginning to end, and added his determination to enter the religious life.

Father André listened with sympathy, and advised him to pause and consider well before he entered a life for which he might have no vocation. He reminded him that as yet he was not even a Catholic.

But Paul's resolution was taken with the fiery intensity of his nature. The constant sight of the crucifix during his days and nights of agony had consoled and strengthened him, as that august sight always does; it had further wrought with the morbid tendency inseparable from combined physical and mental misery, to produce in him the strange religion which Carlyle professed, but like the windbag he was, did not practise, and named the Worship of Sorrow.

Like Father André, Paul felt that joy was impossible to one whose past was so criminal, nothing was left for him but pain; he now rushed into the extreme of self-mortification. He remained some months at the presbytery, until he was quite recovered, sharing as far as a layman could, the occupations of his host, liking the peaceful life, for which he felt himself unworthy, and instructed and curbed by his spiritual father, who at last resigned him to the community with whom his

noviciate was to be passed, not without regret and deep heart-searchings.

The fire which had burnt so fiercely on the altar of human love, now blazed with stronger fervour at a loftier shrine, and for a year or two Brother Sebastian passed through a strange and exciting phase of spiritual experience; his austerities produced their natural result;—visions and ecstasies—all the strange tumult of over-wrought religious feeling, brightened and ennobled by the golden thread of pure and undefiled religion which ran through it all, and which runs through so many strange and mysterious human vagaries. So entirely had he broken with his former life, that it seemed sometimes to the fervid Friar Sebastian as if Paul Annesley were the phantom of some half-forgotten dream, and the people he had known and loved, fancies as insubstantial. Even the mother he had so truly loved, in spite of the misery she had made in his home, faded away. A Madonna in the convent-chapel with a look of Alice attracted him strongly, and sometimes set him dreaming of those far-off phantoms, and then he saw Alice married happily to Edward and forgetful of the trouble he had cast upon her youth, and his heart ached for the mother who mourned him as dead. But not for long; such thoughts were driven away, if not by gentler means, by knotted cords.

Brother Sebastian had only once travelled far from the Dominican Convent in which he had taken refuge from the storm of life, before he was sent to serve the

church in which Edward Annesley saw him during the temporary disability of the *cure*, and on that first occasion the brief encounter by the Lake of Geneva occurred.

Edward looked upon that first meeting as the illusion of a mind overstrained by the perpetual thought of a man whose death he had caused. That brief vision was made more ghost-like and unreal by the fact that Sebastian had put off his friar's black cloak and hood, and was wearing only the white tunic and scapular when he passed Edward; when he saw him, by immediately putting on the black mantle and hood, he became inconspicuous, and thus vanished more effectually than he could have done, had his dress remained white.

Not until Edward Annesley saw the living Paul standing at the altar before him with that wide gaze of mingled pain and dismay, did he realize what his supposed death had cost him. For reason with himself as he would, the thought that Paul had actually met his death at his hands was an abiding grief. Though he did not grow morbid over this acute memory, it made him very sensitive, and lent the keenest sting to those calumnies which made him practically a social outcast. There were moments of dejection in which he did indeed attribute to himself part of the guilt which had apparently resulted in the death of the would-be slayer; brief moments reasoned away painfully enough by the reflection that when he flung Paul from him, he did not

know in which direction either of them would fall; that he was not sure whether Paul had flung him or he had hurled Paul, since when he recovered consciousness, he could remember nothing but Paul's sudden attack and furious words, followed by a wild whirl, in which he had tried to wrest himself from the hands which were pushing him over the brink, and had at last fallen senseless. Gervase Rickman alone knew all. He had seen the attack from a higher and distant point in the path, where the bend of the river bank projected beyond the trees which obscured the spot lower down, and had arrived in time to see both cousins fall.

If Edward's lips had not been sealed by loyalty to the supposed dead man, it would have been a heaven of relief to him to have published the story on the house-tops, and thus disburden himself of a secret it was pain and grief to keep.

All this heavy burden fell from his heart on that Sunday afternoon at the sight of the lost Paul, holding the Sacrament and blessing the kneeling people; such a deep divine relief came to him after the first shock had passed that he could scarcely think what to do next. His sisters, who had not known their cousin so intimately, and who were but children at the time of his loss, did not recognize him: only in coming out one said to the other, "Of whom did the priest remind you? He is very like somebody."

Then their brother joined them and walked only part of the way back, telling them that he had seen a

friend whom he wished to overtake and should perhaps be away for an hour or two.

When he returned to the church, he found that the priest had already left it, having disrobed with amazing rapidity. The sacristan seemed to be a surprisingly stupid rustic; he could not understand Edward's good fluent French, learnt in the school at which Paul had been with him, and his own *patois* was so strong that it was difficult for Edward to understand him. At length, however, it came out that the strange priest was stopping at the presbytery, which was situated in a spot to reach which such complicated directions were necessary, that Edward bid the sacristan conduct him thither personally. But this could not be done at any price, not even for a gold ten-franc piece, the sacristan's duties at the church were so urgent. At last some one was found to act as guide, and the presbytery was eventually reached. The convalescent *cure* received the stranger with great urbanity, and talked so much that it was difficult to get a word in edgeways, and still more difficult to convey any ideas to the *cure's* understanding after the words had reached his ears. Finally Edward heard that Brother Sebastian (the name slipped out at an unguarded moment) had finished his duties at Vauvières and was gone, no one knew whither. The truth that Paul was trying to conceal himself was now obvious.

Edward returned to the inn, told his mother privately what had occurred, and of his intention of

finding the fugitive friar if possible, and set forth on his chase, accompanied by his servant, who spoke French.

By the aid of this man he found out that the brother had left the village on foot immediately after Benediction.

It would be tedious to follow in detail the chase which ensued. Neither railway nor main high-road approached that secluded district, and a few enquiries showed that the friar had not gone by the river. It was therefore best to follow him on foot through by-ways and woods, which Edward did when the direction in which Paul left Vauvières had been ascertained. Annesley's professional training here stood him in good stead; with a fair map and a thorough mastery of topographical details, together with the aid of his man Williams, whom he sent on a parallel route to his own, and bid enquire diligently along the road, he traced the friar to a convent in the town of Volny. He then applied to the superior of the community for information, which was politely refused in such a manner as to leave no doubt on his mind that Paul was in the house. This he watched with such assiduity that both he and his man incurred the suspicions of the authorities, and were obliged to desist after a few days.

Nevertheless they still hung about the town, frequenting churches and making enquiries about preaching friars to no effect. Though Volny is a large town, it is as well to save trouble to the learned reader by re-

commending him not to look on the map for it, or for Vauvières or Bourget, because perhaps he will not find them.

Edward was beginning to think the chase hopeless, since the only marks of identity in the fugitive were the name and the scar; for the garb was a concealment rather than an aid. One evening he strolled out of the town when the dusk was falling, racking his brains for devices to reach one who had cut himself off from every possible means of communication with the outer world, and rejecting every scheme that presented itself in turn, when he came to a dray laden with wine-casks and partially overturned in the road. One of the draymen had been hurt by a cask rolling upon him, the other was tearing his hair and reproaching all the saints in heaven for not coming to his aid. A few peasants, attracted by his cries, were extricating the horses and righting the dray. Edward took off his coat and helped them.

While he was thus occupied he did not see what was happening to the injured man, who had been laid aside upon some sacks. But when he had done all he could, and was standing in his shirt-sleeves wiping his face and looking in the now moonlit dusk at the righted dray, he saw a figure bending over the injured man, and bandaging his head. It was that of a Dominican friar.

His heart gave a strong throb, he stepped into the

shadow of the way-side trees and watched the friar's ministrations in silence.

Presently a light *carriole* came up, the patient was lifted into it and driven slowly away, the friar gave his benediction to the departing procession of dray, *carriole*, and friendly peasants, and turning, went swiftly on his way in the opposite direction, without observing that motionless figure in the shadow.

In a few minutes Edward's quick footsteps were close upon him and reached his ears; but he did not turn. Edward was side by side with him when he spoke.

"Paul," he said—"Paul Annesley."

Then the friar turned with a suppressed cry. He recognised Edward's face in the white moonlight, and looked swiftly in every direction for some way of escape, but, seeing none, stood still, with folded hands, head bent and downcast eyes.

"At last!" cried Edward, laying a vigorous hand on each of his shoulders. "What a chase you have given me! Paul, you did a wrong thing and a cruel thing. All these years we thought you dead. One word from you would have made all the difference."

The gaunt frame quivered beneath Edward's strong touch; the haggard face, which seemed terribly altered in that cold white light, became agitated—the calm mask worn for years was suddenly rent away from the reality beneath; and the gazer's heart was pierced to

the core by this changed aspect, through which his old familiar friend was still so visible.

He could not realize that Brother Sebastian was the living reality and Paul Annesley the faded dream. The monkish garb seemed to him but a piece of masquerade which must be put off, and with it, perhaps, the lines of suffering in the wan face.

The friar's deep blue eyes gazed spell-bound and full of unspeakable feelings into the familiar and once so hated face, on which, as well as on his own, the record of troubled years was now written, but he could utter no word, though his lips moved slightly; he could scarcely think—the sight of Edward's honest face, graver and manlier, if so much sadder than in his young days, stirred him so deeply.

"I thought you dead all this time," Edward continued. "You don't know what it is to think your best friend died by your own hand."

The cloistered life faded like a dream from Sebastian's mind, those phantom figures from the past, which he had so long banished, grew real and lived again at the sound of these wholesome words; his unnatural restraint gave way at last, natural human tears sprang to his eyes, but he could not speak—his cousin's reproach was so keen and yet so different to what he had expected.

CHAPTER III.

THE WEDDING DRESS.

THE time was drawing near to Alice Lingard's wedding-day; every little detail of her future life was arranged; Rickman's letters, in spite of the busy life he was leading, and the important political events in which he was concerned, were growing more frequent, more tender, and more difficult to answer.

One autumn evening a box arrived at the Manor. Alice's heart sank when she saw it, for it contained her wedding-dress.

Sibyl was slightly pained to see how little Alice seemed interested in the dress; she had some difficulty in persuading her to try it on, but at last succeeded after much coaxing on her part, and much persuasion from the dressmaker busy at work in the house.

"If only Gervase were here!" exclaimed Sibyl, when the weighty business was achieved and Alice stood before a cheval-glass, tall and statue-like in the long satin folds, her hair crowned by the white wreath, and the veil floating mist-like about her in the pale twilight. "Wait, and I will fetch papa. Don't stir one inch for your life."

"You are cold, miss," said the dressmaker, for Alice was shivering; "we must hope for a sunny morning for the wedding. To be sure, it is chilly to-night."

"Very chilly," replied Alice, listening to the fitful moan of the wind and the patter of rain on the glass. "How pleased Sibyl is!" she was thinking. For Sibyl had not been pleased, but rather shocked, when the engagement first took place, and only the spectacle of her brother's happiness had reconciled her to it by degrees.

It took some minutes to find Mr. Rickman, minutes during which Alice stood motionless before the spectral reflection of her tall white self, forbearing to move, partly because of the pins, which marked some alterations, partly in obedience to Sibyl.

When Mr. Rickman finally arrived, the dusk had grown so deep that he asked for candles, the delay in lighting which kept Alice still longer in her constrained position, so that at last, when she was properly illuminated, and the old gentleman was scrutinizing her through his glasses, with murmurs of profound satisfaction, she suddenly fell fainting full-length on the carpet, rumpling the satin folds, and crushing wreath and veil indiscriminately together.

"Standing long in one position often produces that effect," Mr. Rickman observed afterwards; "to move but one limb relaxes the tension of every muscle."

"It's the most dreadful luck," whispered the dress-

maker to the maids, who had assembled to look on, "and the veil all crushed, and the dress spotted with the water they threw over her face!"

The next day Sibyl and her father drove into Medington to make some of the innumerable purchases connected with the wedding, but Alice excused herself from accompanying them.

"It is odd," Sibyl said, when starting, "that so much merchandise seems necessary to unite two loving hearts. When I marry I shall run away; then there can be no fuss, and money will be saved."

"Zure enough," Raysh Squire said, when he saw her drive through the village, smiling all over her bright face, "anybody med think she was a gwine to be married, instead of t'other. I never zeen such a maid!"

Alice set off for a walk when the carriage had started; she passed through the fields above the churchyard, and saw Raysh at work, putting the final touch to three little fresh-turfed graves.

"Prettier made graves than they you never zeen, Miss Alice," he observed with pride. "A power o' thought goes into the digging o' they little uns, and shepherd he would hae 'em all put in separate, say what you would. I hreckon he made no count o' the laäbour he giv me."

The little graves went to Alice's heart; she knew what a bitter blank they made in her friend's home, populous as that little home still was, and she went

on her way, wondering at the mystery and sadness of life, and the silent heroism that bears so many burdens.

Hubert bounded on before or trotted at her side, unvexed by mysteries, and keenly conscious of the pleasure of a ramble over the downs. Some children were picking blackberries along the field-hedges, their faces happy and stained with purple juice; they too were unvexed by moral problems.

It was a chill gusty autumn day, with wan sun-gleams and flying scuds; storm-driven gulls flashed their bright plumage against the black curtain of rain-cloud; belated swallows skimmed the ground, fluttering against the wind; Nature was not in one of her sweetest moods, yet she was fascinating rather than sad.

"If only one had not to live," thought Alice, "if one might mingle with Nature and be still."

After some apparently aimless wandering, she caught sight of what she was seeking, the figure of Daniel Pink, moving heavily against the wind, which shook his beard and lifted the cape of the old military great-coat he wore over his smock-frock. He was driving some sheep into a wattled fold, and she waited till he had finished and finally secured his flock by binding a hurdle to its staple. Then he went under the lee of a hedge, and, taking off his coat, set to work to point some ash-spars with his bill-hook. Alice then approached him with her usual friendly greeting, and the

lines on his rugged face softened. He folded his coat and placed it on the bank as a seat for her.

"'Tis fine and loo here," he said, "and you med set down and hrest."

So Alice sat down and watched the white chips fly, with Hubert crouched at her feet, while Rough, the shepherd's dog, now partly superannuated and assisted by a young and inexperienced dog, whose vagaries were a source of much trouble to him, looked at the deerhound with a mistrustful glance.

"Raysh has just finished turfing the little graves, shepherd," she said: "they look very peaceful."

He made no reply, but looked away towards the churchyard, which he could not see, and went on chopping.

"You said once," continued Alice, "that you gave up fretting for them all at once—that you could bear anything now."

"Ay," he replied, stopping in his work to look enquiringly at her.

"There is so much trouble in the world," Alice continued, "sometimes it seems so difficult to bear." The tears sprang to her eyes, and her words died away in a sigh.

The shepherd sat down silently on a pile of ash poles, and thought for a few seconds.

"Ay," he replied at last. "When they dree was took, I couldn't zim to bear it nohow. The pretty ways of 'em, and the little maid that knowing! The biggest

wasn't only dree year old. They knowd avore I'd a turned the carner in the lane, they two, and they'd hrun to meet me when I come home. 'Vather, vather!' they'd cry out, and dance that pretty; and the littlest, he'd get his mother or his sister to hold en up. Vust time I come home and they dree lying still and cold indoors, I pretty nigh went dead. After that I couldn't abide to come home no more till all was abed. One night, lambing-time, a month after I'd a buried them, I was out alone atop of the down. Then I took on thinking, thinking of they dree and their pretty ways I could never see no more, and how they was took off avore we could look hround and all, and I took on that dreadful I zimmered to be tore asunder inside, and I couldn't zim to hold up noways. I thought how I was never one for drink, and always done my best. There was others done wrong, and their children was spared; there, it did zim that hard! Then, when I was like to rive asunder with that went on inside of me, I zes to meself, 'Stand up, Dan'l Pink, and be a man! You've a had many mercies, and what be you to cry out agen One above when trouble is zent?' Then I zaid over the Belief, and it zimmered comforting, and I got up and done zommat for the ship."

Daniel Pink did not say all this straight off, but with many breaks and pauses, and much apparent casting about for words, symbols which are hard to come at when one is not accustomed to handle them and turn them over and about at will; sometimes he stopped in

the middle of a sentence with a catch in his breath, sometimes he looked at Alice for sympathy, sometimes away over the windy landscape. But at this point his manner altered; he turned his face from Alice and seemed to forget her presence and his own identity and spoke in a deeper key, more fluently and with less country accent.

"I sat on the steps o' the hut there," he said, pointing to a wheeled and movable house; "I was afeard to goo in and lay down and leave the yowes, and I fell athinking o' they dree again, and the littlest that pretty! Then it came over me agen as though I should rive asunder, and I shet my teeth and bended my head down and groaned, and held my arms tight over my chest to keep it from bursting. 'Twas the full o' the moon, and the grass white with hrime. I seen all as plain as daylight, the ship feeding, and the new-dropped lambs moving about, and the stars above, when I looked up. Then out of the shade cast by the hill I seen a *man* coming tow'rds me."

The shepherd paused; his face changed, a solemn rapt expression came over it—he was evidently forgetful of all around him. Alice held her breath and left watching his face as she had been doing, covering her own with her hand and bending a little forwards, her arm stayed upon her knee. "A man," he continued, "tall, vurry tall and fine-made, and dressed like St. John in Arden church window, with long curled hair and light shining round his head. I came over that still and

hushed, like when the wind falls at zunzet, and the sea's like glass and the barley stands without a shake. I couldn't so much as stand up, I was that holden. I looked and looked, as though I could never leave off looking. The ship took no notice, and *he* passed through them, slow and solemn, with never a sound. I seen the red marks on the hands and feet; but when he was quite nigh, I could only look at the faäce. 'Twas the look in the eyes that went through me. I caint say what that look was like, it made me that happy and quiet. The figure passed that close, the blue dress, the colour of the sky, nigh touched me. I couldn't turn when he passed beyond; I was holden. But 'twas no drame—the ship was moving about and feeding and the lambs bleating as plain as day. When I could turn, there was the moon shining bright as day, and the frost on the grass and the stars above, and nothing more. Then I zimmed that happy and light and peaceful—I knowed there was nothing I couldn't bear after that!"

The shepherd ceased speaking, but continued his rapt gaze straight ahead, thinking thoughts that Alice dared not interrupt by words.

At last he rose, took up his bill-hook and went on pointing his spars.

"And nothing seems hard to bear now, shepherd?" she asked presently.

"No, miss, nothing zims hard now. I med hae a

power o' trouble yet, plase God I lives long enough, but I 'lows I shaint never fret no more," he replied.

The wind had sobbed itself to rest now, and the sunset was blazing through great bars of rending cloud in marvellous splendour. Alice's feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as she sped homewards, deeply touched and lifted up in heart, thinking thoughts that no words could express.

Daniel Pink could not even read, he had scarcely half a language with which to clothe his simple thoughts; the mighty Past was to him a blank, the garnered treasure of the thoughts of ages and the beautiful songs of great poets, the glory of Art, and the refinements and adornments of human life, were all denied to him. Yet Alice's heart bowed in reverence before him, he had that which great prophets and mighty kings had desired in vain. Could she not emulate his simple resignation? she wondered. She had now reached the churchyard, and leant on the low wall to look at the three little graves.

Daily she had prayed to be a loving wife to Gervase Rickman, and daily the thought of the marriage, now the most obvious of duties, had grown more terrible, until the simple incident of trying on the wedding-dress had overpowered her. If she could but tear Edward out of her heart and her heart with him, she would willingly have done it. But since the unfortunate day in the summer, when the news of her engagement burst upon him, her peace had vanished; she could not forget

his face, his silence, and his one swift glance into her eyes. Yet here on this very spot he had offered himself to Sibyl.

It was too late to hesitate—she was as much bound as if actually married; and her heart was incapable of treachery, especially to Gervase, and to the old man who hung upon her with such trustful dependence. To marry this man, whom she liked but could not love, was plainly her duty, to swerve from it was cowardice; marriage was in her eyes a sacrament, love would doubtless be given with it. Peace had come to Daniel Pink, would it be denied her in due time? She would wait patiently and shrink from no duty, however hard.

Alice little thought that at that very hour, a friar, in the narrow solitude of his cell, was driving her from his mind with literal scourging of the flesh, as if an image so wholesome and so suggestive of good, could in any wise harm. Truly peace and self-conquest come in various guise, yet only by one way, the way of Faith and Duty.

No vision shone upon Alice, nor did she use bodily pain to conquer what seemed invincible; but at last she walked home through the darkening fields with perfect peace in her heart, confident that however her soul might now shrink, she would have strength to be true at the difficult moment and to the end. When she saw Sibyl's sweet face on reaching home, she returned her smile frankly without inward self-reproach, listened with due interest to the account she gave of the afternoon's

business, and commended her purchases with sufficient animation. Yet she was glad that Sibyl left her for a few hours' study; and when she was gone, she sank into an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire thankful to enjoy the luxury of solitude.

Mr. Rickman was busy in his study; the servants were in another part of the house, which was very still, so still that the hall-clock's ticking was audible and every little movement in the rose-tree trained by the window asserted itself. Through all this stillness, she presently heard a carriage drive up and the door-bell ring, and started into a listening attitude. "Gervase!" she murmured, remembering that he had said he might run down any day for a night or two.

It was not Gervase; for he did not open the door and walk in, but waited while a servant came from some remote attic, whence Alice heard her descend in the silence and pass from corridor to corridor, her footsteps echoing in Alice's strained ears, and finally open the door just as the visitor had raised his hand to ring again.

Why should Alice's heart beat so fast? She could not hear more than a faint murmur of a man's voice when the door opened; she did not know what she expected. But when the maid tripped in and said, "Captain Annesley wishes to see Miss Lingard," she thought that she had known who was there from the first, and, with a presentiment that some crisis was approaching, bade the maid show him up.

She heard his step on every stair, and was glad of the growing dusk to hide her face; the day when he first came six years ago and saw her in that very room in the spring sunshine returned to her mind with all its overwhelming associations. She could not remain still, but rose from her seat; it seemed as if she would have herself in better control standing than sitting.

So he came in and found her standing on the rug with the firelight upon her, and something in her face not easy to describe, though she received him calmly, saying that she was surprised to see him, having supposed him to be on the Continent.

"I wished to see you alone," he said, with an air that impressed her and inspired her with dim foreboding. "I have something to tell you that will surprise you."

"No bad news, I hope?" she asked, faintly.

"You once asked me to tell you all that I knew of my cousin's disappearance," he continued. "I could not do so then. I can now. I believed that you loved him, Alice, and that is how I interpreted your reason for refusing me. What happened on that afternoon, you said, made it impossible for you ever to marry."

"But I am going to be married," she urged in a faint voice.

"You are *engaged* to be married," he corrected, "and perhaps you do not care to know what happened on that afternoon. But you must know. It is Paul's

wish. He is still living. He sends you a message, and a letter."

"Paul? Paul? not dead? Oh no!" she cried, passing her hand before her eyes as if to clear away the mist rising before them. "What does this mean?"

"He is not dead. I have found him," continued Edward; "he has told me all—*all* that passed between you."

Alice trembled and looked at him appealingly. Why did he come thus to trouble her peace, and why did he speak in that hard voice? It seemed as if he was there to judge her.

"Stay," she replied, "I know more than you think. I heard you talking. I was under the trees when you passed. You made Gervase promise not to tell what had occurred, especially not to tell me."

"Do you know why I wished you not to know?" he asked, almost fiercely. "I wished to spare you. I thought you loved that poor fellow. *I was told so.*"

"What I felt then is now of no consequence," returned Alice coldly. "But since I asked you to tell me what you knew of that unfortunate affair, I must certainly listen."

"Thank you. In the meantime I will deliver Paul's letter to you. Perhaps when you have read it you will think that my story is unnecessary."

Alice took the letter with a shaking hand, and though it was now too dark to read it, she made out the superscription in the once familiar hand by the fire-

light, and trembled very violently. "It is terrible," she faltered, "to read a letter from one you have so long thought dead."

"It will be better to read it, nevertheless," he replied remorselessly. Then, seeing a taper on the writing-table, he lighted it, placed it near the trembling, agitated woman, and withdrew to the other side of the room, looking out of the window into the gathering night,—the window in which he had first seen her.

Alice was a long time reading that letter, though it was not very lengthy, and was written and worded clearly enough. The garden and the down beyond it sank into deeper and deeper shadow while she read; the trees lapsed into solid black masses; a stray, wan star, peeped here and there through rents in the flying clouds, and then a watery moon rose, and transfused the black shapes with changing glory.

The silence deepened, the hall clock ticked steadily through it. Edward continued motionless at the window, Alice motionless in her chair at the table, some coals fell together in the grate, a bright flame leapt up and cast its fitful radiance over the room, and over the two silent figures; Sibyl's cat stirred comfortably in her slumber by the fire, and gave herself a cosy hug. Alice wished almost that she had never been born.

At last she spoke, and there was some leaven of contrition, some air of a convicted offender in her manner.

"Captain Annesley," she said, in a clear and even

voice, "I once did you a great injustice, an injustice I can never repair. It was not wholly my fault. I was—misled."

Her voice changed and deepened with this last word. Edward turned and saw her face clearly illumined by the taper burning before her, and the trouble in it divided his heart like a sharp sword. But there was more than trouble in her face, there was something he had never pictured upon those gentle features, a mingling of horror and indignation.

"Oh, Alice!" he cried, advancing towards her, "Alice!"

"Hush!" she replied, waving him back. "Do you know what this means? He was to have been my husband in a few days. He was my dearest friend."

He stopped, thunderstruck, not immediately perceiving that she was speaking of Gervase, but smitten through with the keen anguish in her voice.

"What have I done?" he asked. "Oh, Alice! you did not love *him*," he added, thinking that his coming had only plunged her into deeper, perhaps irreparable sorrow.

"You should have spoken that day in the garden," she continued, in a low, half-suppressed tone, "I had a right to know then. You *should* have spoken."

"How could I speak?" he returned in surprise. "He was dead. What passed was our secret. Paul has spoken now—but even——" he stopped, he could not say that he had come that night only to save her

from the misery of marrying a man so false as Gervase Rickman.

Alice had risen in her trouble and stood in the full blaze of the firelight. "This is the only home I have ever known!" she said, looking round the familiar room, and wringing her hands together in her desperate pain. "And though I did not love him, I trusted him. Oh! how I trusted that false man," she added.

She had not heard the door-bell ring, swift steps passing through the hall and up the echoing stair, and now, as she faced the door, she was startled to see it open and disclose the smiling and confident face of Gervase Rickman.

CHAPTER IV.

FACE TO FACE.

BRIGHT visions passed before Gervase Rickman's mental gaze as he drove from the station in the chilly dusk, dreams in which love played a great part, but ambition a greater.

In winning Alice he had won the desire of his heart, a desire that would never have grown to such mighty proportions but for the difficulties which hedged it round. The wedding-day was so near now, that something of the coolness of certainty pervaded his thoughts of it; he had even got so far as to pity himself with a pity tinged by self-commendation for the sacrifices his approaching marriage involved. He knew that he ought to look higher than Alice Lingard now; personally she was all that even his wife should be, but, although her family was superior to his, she brought him no aristocratic connections, such as he needed. The marriage might even hinder him from strengthening such connections as he had already formed, while, as for her little fortune, which had once been so desirable an object to him, it would scarcely make any difference to a man whose successful financial operations

were daily assuming grander, though more perilous proportions. His marriage was indeed a most virtuous act. Alice was not so young as she had been; life had taken the freshness from her beauty, such as it was, and stamped her features with an indelible record. Yet he well knew that beauty had never been her greatest charm, but rather an inward something, which, when it touched men's hearts, bound them to her with irresistible force; a certain air about her, a way of moving, smiling, speaking, or being silent, which filled the surrounding atmosphere with grace, and forged adamant chains about the souls of her lovers. Virtue, in Rickman's case as in others, would bring its own reward. For a deep, seldom-heard whisper from the very depths of his heart told him that while he clung to Alice he had not quite done with his better nature; if he let her go, he would part with the last restraints of conscience, a thing, it must be confessed, which is a terrible inconvenience in a career of political ambition.

That ambition, insatiable as it was, nevertheless was in a fair way of being gratified. Scarcely a year had passed since he was returned for Medington, yet he had effected much, especially during the recent battle over the Conservative Reform Bill. In and out of the House he had done yeoman's service, recognized as such by the leaders of the Opposition. He had been ubiquitous; attending and speaking at meetings here and meetings there, adding fuel to the fire of political agitation, which at that time blazed fiercely

enough, and he had been particularly useful at a bye-election in which his party won a seat. Mrs. Walter Annesley had renewed many of her former aristocratic acquaintances in late years, and had given him excellent introductions, of which he had made the best use. He was well adapted for climbing the social ladder; he had good manners, tact and observation, fluent speech and ready wit, and was absolutely impervious to the impertinence of social superiors, when it suited his purpose, otherwise a person whom it was on the whole wise to respect. He was a brilliant speaker, his voice daily improved, and no amount of labour exhausted him.

Thus, with a long vista of political success opening brightly before him, and the prospect of domestic happiness filling the near distance, Gervase drove up to the door of his father's house that autumn evening, and, knowing the family habits by heart, went lightly up the stairs to the drawing-room, where he thought to find Alice alone.

When he opened the door and saw her standing with that strange look and despairing gesture in the mingled lights of the fire and the solitary taper, though something in her aspect gave him a shock, he supposed her to be alone; it was only when she spoke that he made out the dark figure of Edward Annesley confronting her in the dimmer light of the further part of the room.

"Gervase," Alice said, gazing full upon him with-

out any salutation or preliminary whatever, "when I told you on the down that day that I had refused Edward Annesley solely because of what you witnessed on the banks of the Doubs six years ago, why did you tell me that I was *quite right*?"

These two syllables, which had so often echoed painfully through his conscience, were uttered with so keen an incisiveness that they cut into him like knives. Even his ready resource and iron nerve failed him for the moment, and he stood speechless, looking involuntarily from her to Annesley, as if for a solution of the enigma. The latter returned his gaze with a stern unbending contempt that failed to sting him in the anæsthesia which paradoxically results from such excessive pain as Alice's look gave him.

"Why," continued Alice, with a passionate scorn which told all the more from its contrast with her usual demeanour, "did you tell me that afternoon on the scene of Paul's death, that it would be to Edward Annesley's discredit to reveal what actually occurred?"

"Discredit," he returned, recovering his self-command, and taking refuge in a quibble, "was not the word, if I remember rightly. We are not alone, my dear Alice; you seem to be a little upset."

She looked at him with increasing contempt. "Why," she continued, "did you assure me that Edward Annesley loved your sister and had never more than a passing fancy for me?"

"My dear child, do consider times and places a

little. If I told you that, it was doubtless because I believed it. I was not alone in taking that view of the situation."

"Why," she went on, "did you persuade Edward Annesley that I loved his cousin?"

"I was not alone in that opinion, either," he replied with a forced smile. "Captain Annesley," he added, "perhaps you will do me the favour of going into another room. Miss Lingard, as you perceive, is not in a condition to receive visitors."

"Quite so," Edward replied, taking his hat, "I will choose another time to finish my interview with Miss Lingard. My presence," he added with unwonted sarcasm, "must be excessively embarrassing."

"No, Captain Annesley," said Alice, in the same incisive tones, "you will not leave this room. While you are here, that man, false as he is, dares not deny the truth of what I say."

Gervase turned very pale, and all the sweetness seemed to vanish out of his life for ever. It was difficult to vanquish this resolute spirit, but he had the gift of knowing when he was beaten. He recognized the hard fact that nothing, not even his strong imperious will, could now win Alice back. He heard the knell of all his better aspirations in her words.

"Stay, Captain Annesley," he said quietly, "since Miss Lingard wishes it; though lovers' quarrels are not usually conducted in public. Perhaps, Alice, I may be

permitted to ask why these reproaches are suddenly hurled at me in the presence of a third person?"

"Because that person has suffered the most from the web of falsehood and intrigue you have been weaving all these years," she replied.

"And he has come to complain to you," returned Gervase. "Don't you think, Annesley, it would have been more manly, to say the least of it, to tax me openly with whatever you have against me?"

"I have taxed you with nothing," he replied. "I came here with the intention of replying to a question Miss Lingard asked me some years ago, but have not found it necessary to do so. I have simply handed her a letter which explained all she wished to know."

"You were in the confidence of both cousins," continued Alice, "and you abused the confidence of both. You were in my confidence, and you abused that."

"By loving you and purposing to make you my wife."

"Which you will never do," she replied, drawing a ring from her finger, and giving it to him.

Edward, who, since Gervase's request to him to leave the room, had been divided between the feeling that the request was reasonable and a desire to protect Alice, whose wish that he should stay showed a certain fear of being alone with a man so treacherous, now decided that the only becoming course for him was to go. He had already reached the door, when Sibyl,

who had just been informed of her brother's arrival, opened it and came in.

"Captain Annesley!" she exclaimed, expecting to see Gervase only. "Oh! Gervase—Why, what is the matter, Alice?" she added.

"Dear Sibyl," replied Alice, suddenly calming to more than her wonted gentleness, "we have just had a severe shock. Paul Annesley is not dead."

"Not dead!" replied Gervase. "Why, I saw him die. Alice, you do not know what you are saying."

"It is quite true," added Edward; "he was swept out of sight and washed ashore alive. I have seen him. He will probably be in England before long. He has become a Roman Catholic, and entered a religious order, and a great deal has to be done before he can obtain permission to visit his mother, as he wishes to do."

Sibyl listened with eager interest, as if her life depended on Edward's words, and then on a sudden she burst into tears. "Oh! Edward," she sobbed, "the truth must come out now and your name will be cleared for ever. I always knew that this hour would come."

"You always believed in me, Sibyl," Edward replied with a slight quiver in his voice, while taking the hand she frankly offered; "I think I never had a truer friend. I only care really for what my friends think of me."

Sibyl only smiled her gentle smile in reply, though she did not quickly recover her calm, and Alice looked

at them with a strange expression not devoid of reproach.

"This is nonsense," said Gervase; "if Paul Annesley didn't die, why in the world should he disappear?"

"He was tired of his life," Edward replied.

"He thought," Alice was explaining, "to make atonement to the friend he had injured——"

"Alice," interrupted Edward, "that is our secret, remember, between us two and Mr. Gervase Rickman."

"It will soon be no secret," she replied; "that is why Paul is coming to England, as he tells me in his letter."

"The whole story is incredible," said Gervase impatiently. "Do you mean to say that Paul Annesley is a monk? He will have some difficulty in proving his identity here. No one who knew him would believe anything so preposterous. Paul of all men in the world to turn monk indeed! Some monk is humbugging you, Annesley, for the sake of getting the property. Besides," he added, "no religious order would receive a man without a pension."

"He was not without money," Edward explained. "The diamonds we saw at Neufchâtel were in his possession. Altogether he had about a thousand pounds, as well as professional knowledge which would be useful to a friar."

Yet Rickman believed the story. A letter from Paul alone and nothing that Edward could have told her, accounted for Alice's strange behaviour to himself. The

superscription of the letter was shown him, and he admitted that it was a good imitation of Paul Annesley's handwriting.

He then left the room ostensibly to tell the news to his father, who was happily absorbed in his favourite studies and ignorant of all that was passing.

Edward had yet to break the intelligence to Mrs. Walter Annesley, for she had refused to admit him when he called that afternoon. He hoped to get an interview in the evening, and was hurrying off for the purpose of making another trial.

"I broke my news too roughly," he said in wishing Alice goodnight, for his hard manner to her vanished after her stormy reception of Gervase. "It was not a pleasant duty, and that spoils the temper," he explained.

Alice looked down, then she looked up with her eyes clouded with tears. "I owe it to you," she faltered, "to tell you all—how I came to misjudge you. But not now."

"Some day," he replied with increasing gentleness, "you shall tell me. When you feel inclined."

"Alice," Sibyl asked when he was gone, "what led you to misjudge him? There is some mystery behind this."

Alice took Sibyl's bright face in her hands and kissed it with a tenderness that almost surprised her.

"Never ask, Sibyl," she replied; "let me as well as others have the benefit of your loyal trust. You are the best friend *I* ever had or ever shall have."

A few minutes later Alice was in the hall, pacing restlessly to and fro, and trying to collect the fragments of her shattered world, when Gervase issued from his father's study, closing the door behind him, and approaching her.

"I shall return to town at once," he said, thus relieving her from a great embarrassment; "I have told my father that I found a telegram awaiting me here."

"It is plain that we cannot be under the same roof again," she replied.

"You will never forgive me," he added gloomily. "Jacob was never forgiven for stealing *his* blessing, though he got the blessing nevertheless. You asked me why I deceived you, Alice," he added, his voice deepening and touching her in spite of the loathing with which his perfidy inspired her. "It was because I loved you with such a love as men seldom feel. I cannot tell when it began—years before either of the Annesleys thought of you; it never faltered—never. You never had and you never will have a more constant and devoted lover——"

"Oh, hush, Gervase!" she sobbed, "do you think I am made of stone? Were you not my only brother and best friend? Are you not your mother's son? Can you not think what a bitter thing it is to have to think ill of you, to know of your cruel falseness?"

"No," he interrupted quickly, "I cannot; you are stone in comparison with me. You can never even

picture such a passion as mine to yourself, cold, hard, immaculate woman that you are!"

"Gervase!"

"Listen, Alice," he said, collecting himself and curbing the fierce passion in his voice. "You have three lovers, and, woman-like, will probably choose the worst. Of these three, one attempted murder for the love of you; one lied for your sake, though not for your sake alone, for Sibyl's happiness was at stake; and one"—here he smiled a sarcastic smile—"he who saw and loved you the latest did not think it worth while so much as to clear himself from a dreadful imputation for your sake. Which of these three, think you, loved you the best?"

"He who loved honour and loyalty more," replied Alice, proudly and without hesitation.

"And he proved it when he offered himself to another woman who had the good sense to reject the cold-blooded——"

"Hush, Gervase! things are bitter enough already," Alice broke in; "do not embitter them more by idle words. Let us part in peace."

"Peace!" echoed Gervase with a scornful laugh. And he looked at the hearth fire in silence awhile.

When he spoke again his mood was altered.

"Alice," he said gently, "do not let Sibyl despise me."

"I will tell her nothing that I can avoid to your discredit, Gervase," she replied.

"I have said nothing of breaking off our engage-

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ment yet. Put it as you please, but do not break with them, if you can help it. I hope you will not leave them; my father ages visibly. We might part with a mutual conviction that we were unsuited to each other," he added with a sardonic smile.

So they agreed, and then Rickman's carriage drove up, and Mr. Rickman and Sibyl came into the hall to see him off.

"Good-bye, Alice," he said in his usual quiet manner, when he had parted with his father and sister.

"Good-bye," she replied in a faint far-off voice.

She stood on the steps and watched the carriage till its lights diminished to points, and were finally swallowed up in the dense dark night; while Gervase looked back at the graceful figure standing in the fan-shaped light streaming from the open hall, till the bend of the road swept it from him, and his heart ached with a heavy despair.

Ambition, wealth, success, power—all was now nothing without Alice.

CHAPTER V.

RESTORATION.

IF one could picture the feelings with which a disembodied soul, reclothed in the frail garment of its mortality, would revisit the scenes of its earthly life, one might form some idea of the sensations which thrilled the heart of Paul Annesley, when, after setting in

motion the machinery necessary to permit any irregularity in the life of a friar, he found himself in England, clad once more in the long disused and almost forgotten personality which he had put off when, to use his own expression, he left the world. Brother Sebastian, using another language, thinking other thoughts, deprived of name and fame and liberty, not only of action, but in a certain degree of thought, branded as it were with the tonsure, and dressed in a garb which further stamped him as one set apart from common human interests, having voluntarily undergone a punishment more severe than any inflicted on the vilest criminal prisoner in civilized states; this poor, mortified, unmannered, if you will, and certainly half unhumanized Sebastian, who yet enjoyed a peace Paul Annesley had never known—albeit a peace too deep, too like an opium-trance to be wholesome and natural—had become a familiar friend, while that fiery-hearted, undisciplined Paul was a stranger, and the once familiar faces which surrounded that Paul and his once familiar habits and thoughts were even more strange to Sebastian.

It needed no little courage in one so disaccustomed to personal freedom and so weaned from the stir and friction of ordinary life, once more to face the world, especially in a land of heretics; but Sebastian, after five minutes' conversation with his cousin, whom he had questioned as to his life with an eager rapidity that soon laid the whole situation bare to him, was too

firmly convinced of the immediate necessity for repairing the wrong he had unintentionally committed to hesitate an instant. The duty was equally obvious to his Superior fortunately, since the Superior was the spring that set in motion the cogs and wheels of the machinery which effected his brief escape to the world.

In this dear little self-complacent island of ours, where to see a nun was till late years the rarest occurrence, and where the garb of a monk is almost unknown, we have fallen into a pleasant habit of assuming that these cloistered lives have passed away with the shadows, sorrows, and discomforts of the middle ages. Some of us have a hazy notion that printing, steam, electricity, and the latest scientific dogma have put an end to all that, and that the prophecy of Victor Hugo's printer, who looked from his press to Notre Dame and said, "Ceci tuera cela," is fulfilled, in spite of the fact that this grand building, the imperfect symbol of a faith that cannot die, still stands as it has stood for ages, though many revolutions have rushed past it in bloody waves and it has more than once echoed to the clang of the invader's arms.

Yet these phases of religious feeling still exist; unoffending monks and nuns are just as real, though not such insufferable nuisances, as the frantic Salvationers who make day and night hideous with profane bawlings in our streets; monks and nuns are in fact content to plague only themselves and leave their neighbours in

peace. Thus when Medington folk saw a gentleman in ordinary clerical attire, with shaven face and a skull cap beneath his hat, and were told that this was a veritable friar, the thing seemed to them like a fairy-tale, more especially when they were bid to recognize in this calm clergyman the familiar form and face of Paul Annesley, that smart and gay young doctor with the black-bearded face, the ready speech, and genial though stately manners they once knew; and many were inclined to doubt until they spoke to him. Even then it was an eerie thing to hear the voice of a man so long reckoned among the dead, and whose sole visible link with his former self appeared to be a scar on the face; a man who had so closely followed the counsel of Thomas à Kempis as to have literally stamped out his passions as we stamp out flames,—briefly, to have killed his veritable self, leaving little more than a husk of acquired habit behind.

He remained some time in England, for he had much to do; and not only in the little world of Medington, but also in London and at Chatham, where his cousin was stationed and where he visited him, the two appeared constantly together, so that the old scandal, which had embittered almost every relation in Edward's life for so many years, was publicly put to death and done away with for ever. It was now clear that Paul Annesley had not even been killed, much less murdered; it was equally clear that he would not be on terms of such intimacy with a man who had

tried to compass his death. The fact of his burying himself in a cloister gave a motive, however crazy, for his disappearance, and disposed people to believe that his desperate leap into the Doubs was voluntary and probably suicidal in intention. There were many theories on the subject, but the most generally accepted was that a sudden bound from poverty to wealth had developed the hereditary tendency to insanity, a tendency further aggravated by the fatal woman known to be the cause of all human disaster. The woman's name varied, but on the whole was unknown. It had been said from the first that Rickman knew more than he cared to say upon the matter, there had even been a doubt as to whether he had not borne false witness in the court of probate when giving the evidence of Paul's disappearance and supposed death, necessary to obtain probate of his will. Although there was still a mystery concerning both Edward's whereabouts at the moment of his cousin's disappearance and his obstinate silence upon the subject, the mystery was no longer interpreted to his discredit.

Edward Annesley did not accomplish his pious intention of breaking the news of her son's restoration to Mrs. Annesley, since that inflexibly vindictive woman resolutely continued to shut the door in his face. The task was therefore transferred to Alice Lingard, who fulfilled it with the tenderness and tact to be expected of her.

When the fact that her son lived finally burst upon

Mrs. Annesley, she seemed stunned and sat silent for a long time.

"If he lives," she said at last; "why is he not here?"

"It is a long story," Alice replied, half-frightened at the absence of joy, or any other emotion on the mother's part. "He was—unhappy——"

"Why was my son unhappy?" asked Mrs. Annesley, fixing a cold and terrible regard upon Alice.

"His letter will tell you," replied Alice, trembling inwardly.

"Give me that letter."

"It is in Edward Annesley's possession——"

"A forgery of his—I curse the day that young man entered this house," she cried, going white with anger.

Alice tried to soothe her. "A great change has come over Paul," she said presently. "He is now very religious."

"That is indeed a change," his mother replied with involuntary sarcasm. "But why did he not return to me after his accident? Surely he could not have been imprisoned, kidnapped in a civilized country like France?"

"No," replied Alice, "he wished—he—entered a religious house."

"What do you mean, Alice Lingard?" she exclaimed in horror and agitation, "you cannot, dare not say that my son is a monk."

"Dear Mrs. Annesley, do not think of that; remember only, that your son was dead and is alive again—that you will soon look upon his face——"

"Never," she cried, "never will I look upon the face of an apostate, an idolator, a shaven, craven fanatic. Better, ten thousand times better, he were in his grave—better anything than this. He is no son of mine—a Papist, a monk!"

"Your only son, your only child," Alice said reproachfully.

The woman was human after all, and burst into a passion of weeping painful to see, but less painful than the cold anger which went before and made Alice shudder to her heart's core.

Suddenly she stopped and turned upon Alice. "I see it all now. You did not love my son," she cried, "and that made him hate his life."

"No," she replied, "I never pretended to love him, save as a friend. I grieved for him when he was lost. I tried to supply his place to you."

"You drove him to despair, you robbed me of my only child," she cried; "the curse of a childless widow is upon you, Alice Lingard."

"Do not say such things; you will be sorry hereafter. The shock has overpowered you, you do not know what you are saying." Alice did not know how to comfort her, when she remembered that Paul was, after all, dead to the outside world.

Mrs. Annesley was silent, smiling a bitter smile, and Alice rose and left her for awhile, hoping that she would calm down. She herself needed the relief of solitude after this emotional strain, and going out into the garden, she sat beneath the yellowing linden-trees and gave way to tears.

She accused herself of having driven Paul Annesley to despair, she did not reflect that his own unbridled nature had done the mischief. She had spoilt three men's lives, and been the cause of guilt and misery unspeakable, though through no fault of her own. She could not love more than one—at least at a time; and she certainly could not marry more than one. She had loyally striven to suppress her own inclinations and make the most worthy of the three happy, and she had made them all miserable. She who could not bear to give pain, even when most necessary and salutary, seemed fated to mar instead of blessing the lives of the men who loved her. That these three men should set their hearts upon her was hard, and surely no fault of hers. It was not as if she was so very beautiful, she reflected; Sibyl was infinitely prettier and more pleasing; Sibyl charmed wherever she went with her grace and sparkle; but Sibyl did not kindle these deep and terrible passions in men's hearts.

Though she had certainly tried to bring herself to listen to each of them in turn, until each in turn had proved unworthy of a good woman's regard, she had never tried to attract either; ready as her sensitive con-

science was to accuse herself and excuse others, she could not lay that to her charge, she knew well that she had none of the graceful and unconscious coquetry which was one of Sibyl's distinguishing charms; in her smallest actions as well as thoughts she was transparent and straightforward to a fault. It was true that she had resigned her heart to Edward too quickly, at least the world would say too quickly; for Alice knew in her inmost heart that women have less power than men to withhold their affections, and not more, as a brutal conventionality assumes; that the deepest and best attachments arise in this sudden and spontaneous way; but she had never tried to captivate him, had rather held aloof from him in her proud self-reverence. Why then had all this fallen upon her, why was she the evil fate in the three lives which were each in a way so dear to her?

When Alice had reached this point in her meditations, the sound of Daniel Pink's words returned to her mind, "It seemed that hard!" She saw the shepherd's weather-beaten face, its ruggedness subdued by a sublime trust; she thought of his hard life and many sorrows; she saw him watching his sheep in the frosty moonlight, as he had related, and the remembrance of what he had told her quieted the rising murmurs in her heart.

She rose and returned to Mrs. Annesley, bearing in mind the desolation and disappointments of a life that was too near the downward verge to have much earthly hope, and prepared to suffer ingratitude and upbraiding in silence.

Mrs. Annesley finally consented to receive her prodigal in consequence of a letter Gervase Rickman wrote her. In this he condoled with her on the unfortunate turn Paul's religious feelings had taken, and made some observations on the zealous proselytism of the Romish Church, and of the esteem in which English perverts were held at the Vatican, using the names of Wiseman, Manning and Newman, to point his moral and adorn his tale. Instantly on reading this, Mrs. Annesley beheld a vision: she saw herself the mother of a cardinal, and relented.

Paul, daily besieged with tracts and masses of controversial literature, and bombarded by arguments which he heard chiefly in respectful and aggravating silence, passed some time beneath his mother's roof, scandalizing the maids by sleeping on the floor and using no linen, but otherwise conducting himself like an average Christian, save that he was always going to chapel on week-days. At his instance, Edward was also received by his stern aunt. But she did not forgive him; the true history of his part in her son's virtual death made her hate him more bitterly than ever.

When Paul finally left England, his mother felt his loss even more severely than when she had supposed him dead; and, being no longer sustained by the prospect of vengeance, she gradually declined in health and died in the course of a few years.

Sebastian found most sympathy and comprehension in Edward. Though the latter did not doubt that Paul

had done wrong in running away from the trouble he had brought upon himself, and wrong in renouncing the duties and responsibilities of his life, he saw that he could not turn back. Much as he disliked anything approaching to asceticism, he was inclined to think that a nature so fiery and so destitute of self-control needed the iron discipline of monastic rule, as a confirmed drunkard needs the restraint of an asylum, and the habit of total abstinence. Moderation seemed impossible to such a man. But these lenient views of monasticism were spasmodic and were held generally after conversations in which the friar had spoken with burning and eloquent enthusiasm of the joys of self-renunciation, of his hopes and aspirations, of the prospects held out to him of more active employment, in which his medical knowledge and other talents would be devoted to the service of men; and explained to him that friars differed from monks in combining the active with the contemplative life, a fact which was hard to drive into his obtuse Protestant understanding.

At those times it was impossible even for a practical hard-headed Englishman not to see that Friar Sebastian was a nobler being than Paul Annesley; though in cooler moments he thought with pity and regret of his lost friend, Paul, and was inclined to wish him back again, faults and all.

After an interview which Paul had with Alice in the Manor garden one day, he gave up striving to

banish her from his thoughts, and suffered her to remain there till the last hour of his life. He was surprised and glad to find himself quite calm in her presence, and recognized that the terrible yearning which once so distracted him was quite dead, and succeeded by a pure and tender regard, so free from selfishness and so content with absence, that even one vowed to give up all human ties need fear nothing from it. He gave her a little crucifix, which she wore ever after, and his face at the end of that interview had a more humanly happy look than it had worn for years. When he returned to his community he was so changed by this painful but wholesome contact with the world that the brethren scarcely knew him. From that time all austerities not imposed by the rule of his order ceased, and he regained his former bodily and mental health. And if he regretted the vows he had taken, no human being ever knew.

Besides removing the imputation from his cousin's name, Paul had much to do to put him in possession of his property. First he had to prove his identity and come to life legally, which was a troublesome business; then he had to execute a voluntary conveyance, transferring the bulk of his landed property, which, as was mentioned before, was not entailed, to Edward Annesley, and a deed of gift by which his mother became the legal owner of such property as had been assigned her by his will; a portion of his property he reserved for himself as an Englishman, and yielded to the fraternity

as a Dominican friar. Those who received him into the community had consented, in consideration of the peculiar circumstances—amongst them his condition that he could not take the vows if that involved touching the property he had renounced to his cousin—to be content with the small fortune he was then able to bring.

All these things, as will readily be imagined, were not effected without time and patience, and the aid of learned and expensive lawyers; the last circumstance is pleasant to reflect upon, because humane people like to think that somebody—if only a stray lawyer or so—is benefited by the chances and changes of this mortal life.

When, after that pleasant interview with Alice, Brother Sebastian went to the house to make his farewells to Sibyl and Mr. Rickman, Alice remained behind alone in the garden.

She was not a monk, but a young living woman, with a warm and tender heart, and what had passed between her and her former lover and present friend had stirred that heart to its depths. She wandered slowly along the garden paths, through the wicket to the meadow, until she found herself under the dark roof of the pine-trees, which swayed gently in low and solemn music above her head.

It was winter, and the quiet grey day was drawing to a close, the mild air taking a sharp edge as the sun

sank. She paced the dry soft carpet of fir-needles, with her faithful dog by her side, and a growing happiness in her heart. Her youth had been troubled, and she had borne a heavy yoke in riper years; that yoke was now falling from her shoulders, and life, which had been so bewildering and difficult, began to show a clear and easy path for her weary feet—feet still young though so wearied by the stony mazes they had trodden.

Sibyl and Mr. Rickman had taken the breaking of her engagement with Gervase more gently than she could have hoped; Sibyl had even said that she always regarded the match as a mistake on both sides; Mr. Rickman had comforted himself with the reflection that he should not lose her. But he no longer clung to Alice as he had done; he flung himself more now upon Sibyl, which, after all, was more natural and desirable. Sibyl's affection for Alice was as great as ever, but from that time Alice observed that a distance arose and gradually widened between the brother and sister; she supposed that Sibyl had some intuition of the truth, a suspicion increased by Sibyl's silence upon the relations which had existed between Gervase and herself.

The grey sky overhead broke into pearly fragments, tinted with gold and rose towards the west, where the glowing sunset seemed to have consumed the last speck of cloud; the fir-trunks looked incandescent in the warm glow; Alice's face was doubly transfigured with radiance from within and from without, while she thought of all

that had passed, and how of the three caskets of lead, of silver and of gold, the best was hers, and listened to the tranquil country sounds, the hum of the threshing-machine in the yard below, the voice of the cowman calling the cows by name and trudging home with the last pails of milk, the evening song of the robin, pathetically cheerful, the cheery good-night of a labourer going homewards past the farm-yard.

Then she heard another and well-known footstep, beating quick even time on the lane which led by the meadow to the back of the house, and a well-known voice singing. The song stopped, for the singer caught sight of her figure over the hedge in the evening glow, and he went into the meadow instead of going to the house, whither, with the ostensible purpose of announcing the approaching marriage of his sister Eleanor with Major McIlvray, he was bound.

Alice turned towards him, the sunset clothing her in raiment of living light; they had scarcely met since the stormy evening when he brought Paul's message, and thus he had not heard the story she had then promised to tell him. It seemed but a moment from Edward's first sight of her figure in the evening glory till when he stood by her side beneath the soft murmurs of the pine-roof, thrilled through and through with exquisite happiness.

"Dearest Alice," he said, after some preliminary words had passed and he had read her heart in her face, "I think you are going to take me after all. I

never could believe it possible that we should live apart, even when we were most parted. First tell me why you were so scornful to me. How in the world did you come to think me such a mean sneaking fellow? Some of Master Gervase's work, no doubt."

Alice looked distressed and turned her face towards the sunset behind the black hills, till her features were transfused and etherealized by the lucid glow.

"I wronged you," she replied, "and owe you some amends. Otherwise I would not speak of it."

He did not like this distressed look. "Why," he asked, "should you hesitate to expose one of the greatest scoundrels that ever breathed? Alice, you don't mean to say that you ever cared for that——"; he was obliged to stop for want of a sufficiently powerful epithet. "I know that he schemed and worried you into an engagement."

"I cared for him very much, and I promised his mother on her death-bed, but I never loved him," she replied.

"Well, poor fellow! after all it must have been a great temptation. My dearest Alice, you are quite sure that you never loved him?" he added with a relapse to anxiety.

Alice smiled, and Edward's heart again admitted extenuating circumstances in Gervase's case. She then gave him a brief but complete narrative of the manner in which Gervase had blinded her, had twisted circumstances and misrepresented events until she had been

obliged, in spite of an underlying inner conviction to the contrary, to accept Edward's imputed guilt as truth. And whenever Edward's indignation rose to boiling-point, a look in Alice's face was sufficient to make him regard the delinquent with charity. But when, at his earnest request, she told him of the steps by which she had gradually been led into the engagement, Gervase once more became a villain of the deepest dye.

"But after all," he commented at the close of the recital, "he had more thorough and lasting feeling for you than could be expected of such a scoundrel. And Paul cared only too much for you. It was more like infatuation with them; not that either of them ever loved you as I do and did from the very first. It is strange that a woman should have such power," he reflected after a pause; "it is not as if you were so unusually beautiful."

"Really!" Alice commented with an amused smile.

"Because," he added, surveying her with unmoved gravity, "you are not."

Yet the Alice before him to-night was not the worn and sorrowful woman he saw when he brought the tidings that Paul was alive. The beauty of youth, with something that youth, with all its graces, cannot have, had returned to the face upturned to him with a serious sweetness full of latent laughter. She was touched in turn by the change which had recently come over his face—the grim defiant look of late years was gone, the old genial expression replaced it. Not Ulysses under

the touch of Athene was more brightened than Edward now the burden had fallen from him. This changed look, with many subsequent hints from him, helped her to guess what he had suffered in silence, and made her feel that no devotion on her part would be too great to atone for what had gone by.

"No," he continued gravely, "it is not beauty alone. If you do but turn your head, one's heart must follow, and when you speak, it goes to the very centre of one's heart."

"And yet you wanted to marry Sibyl?"

"Dear Sibyl! That rascal might have let his sister alone. He persuaded me that her happiness was in danger, and that she, as well as others, had mistaken the nature of my friendship, and I was fool enough to believe him. Sibyl is one of the sweetest creatures I ever knew, Alice."

"It appears, after all, that you would have preferred Sibyl," Alice said, smiling.

"Dear Sibyl," he repeated gravely. "But," he added, turning to Alice again with a bright smile, "she won't have me. She told me that I was in love with you. She advised me to wait. She said you were worth waiting for. She ought to know."

Alice turned her face away and was silent.

"I think no one will ever know what *she* is worth," she said at last.

"We shall never have a better friend," he added; and Alice echoed his words in her heart.

The sun sank; all the glory of its setting melted into a warm violet tinge, filling the western sky, and making the dark hillside show darker than ever against the light; every sound was hushed save the tinkle of a distant sheep-bell; cottage windows glowed warmly in the village, showing where firesides were cheerful and suppers spread; white rime-crystals were beginning to sparkle on the cold grass, the stars had the keen brilliance of frost; wise people were indoors; yet these two lingered beneath the pines, unconscious of cold, until even Hubert's long-suffering came to an end, and his displeased whines recalled them from beatified cloudland to the solid earth.

Love begins in the warm morning of life, but does not end with it; though the music of birds is hushed, though evening chills come and hair is whitened by the frost of years, it is still warm and bright in the hearts of true lovers; there the sun always shines and the birds continually sing.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

"SHART of putten' of 'em underground, you caint never be zure on 'em," Raysh Squire observed concerning the re-appearance of Paul Annesley, against whom he had secretly borne a grudge ever since the

irregular and uncereemonious manner in which he left the world. "Once you've a got vour veet of solid earth atop of 'em, you med warnt they'll bide quiet. Buryen of mankind is a ongrateful traäde, but I hreckon there aint a surer traäde nowhere. Ay, a dead zure traäde is buryen," he added, not intending the grim pun.

These cheerful observations were part of Raysh Squire's contributions to the hilarity of the wedding party assembled in the great kitchen at Arden Manor to celebrate the marriage of Reuben Gale—who, after several winters spent in Algeria in the service of young Mrs. Reginald Annesley, had outgrown his consumptive tendency—with one of Daniel Pink's daughters, a housemaid at the Manor.

"Right you be, Raysh," replied Mam Gale, "'taint often work of yourn has to be ondone. They med be ever so naïsy avore, they bides still enough when you've adone with 'em."

"Pretty nigh so sure as marryen, your work is, Raysh," John Nobbs struck in with a view to divert conversation to livelier channels.

"Ay, marryen agen," continued Raysh, irritated by the assumption that marrying was not his work, "tain't nigh so zure as buryen; we've a-married many a man twice over in Arden church. There's wold Jackson, you minds he, Master Nobbs? Vive times we married en in Arden church, vive times over, to vive vine women buried alongside of en out in lytten. Dree on 'em was widows."

"I don't hold with so much marrying," observed the bridegroom, to whom these remarks were distasteful. "Once in a lifetime is quite enough for any man," he added with a profound sigh and a serious air.

"What! tired of it already, Hreub?" inquired his grandmother; and there was much laughter and rough joking at Reuben's expense.

"Marryen," observed Raysh, when people had exhausted their mirth and were again amenable to eloquence, "is like vrostës and east winds, powerful onpleasant it es, but you caint do without it in the long hrün."

"Come, Raysh," interrupted an old bachelor and noted misogynist of at least thirty, "speak for yourself."

"Yes, speak for yourself," echoed Reuben.

"You caint do without it," continued Raysh, scornfully ignoring these interruptions, "if you wants to make zure of a ooman. A wivveren sect they be. Shart of gwine to church with 'em and changing of their name, you caint be sure on 'em. Chop hround at the last minute they will. Look at Mrs. Annesley, Miss Lingard that was. John Cave had a-turned a coat hready for me to marry her to Mr. Gervase, and I'd a-bought a bran-new neck-cloth, and everything hready, and the church scoured from top to bottom. That was vour year ago come next Middlemass. Darned if I ever zeen Mr. Merten look onluckier than a did that day. 'Wedden,' he ses, 'there aint a-gwine to be no wedden, Raysh.' That was the first I yeard of it. Zimmed as

though he'd a-knocked all the wind out of me when a zaid that. The ways of the women volk is that wivveren the best on 'em. A ondeniable sect is womankind, a ondeniable sect."

Here John Nobbs, who was at the head of the table, working steadily away at a mighty sirloin, observed that both parties had done better in the matrimonial lottery than if that wedding had taken place. "Misself," he said, "I never giv my consent to that match. 'They'll never goo in double harness,' I ses to misself, many a time when I zeen 'em together."

"Ah, Master Nobbs, I don't go with you," said Jacob Gale. "Mr. Gervase have a looked too high. 'Tis agen nature for a man to look up to his wife. Lady Sharlett comes of one of the highest vamilies in the land, and I warnt she'll make en mind that."

"Mis'able proud is Lady Sharlett," said the gardener. "She was out in gairden a good hour one day, and she took no more count of me than if I'd a ben a malleyshag." *

Here the discussion of Lady Charlotte's peculiarities was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Rickman and Sibyl, accompanied by Edward Annesley and Alice, the latter carrying the two-year-old heir of Gledesworth, whose birthday was being celebrated by a visit to Arden Manor, and a great drinking of healths ensued, accompanied by speech-making, in which Raysh Squire outdid

* Caterpillar.

himself, and the bridegroom endured a purgatory of stammers, blushes, and breakdowns.

"I cannot imagine," Sibyl remarked, when the ceremony was over and the family had left the kitchen for the garden, where they disposed themselves on various seats beneath the apple-trees, now in bloom, "why men, however sensible they may be, always look so foolish when being married."

"Don't you think they have cause, Sibyl?" Edward asked; "that a secret consciousness of their own folly——"

"Folly, indeed!" laughed Sibyl. "Now the brides would do well to look silly or else sad. Yet they never do. The shyest girl in the humblest class always wears a subdued air of triumph at her marriage. Human beings certainly are the oddest creatures."

Here Mr. Rickman expressed a wish, after a long dissertation concerning the gradual evolution of marriage rites from primitive times till now, with some remarks upon such customs as the bride presenting the bridegroom with a whip and the throwing of rice, to see this triumphant look upon Sibyl's face before long.

"My dear papa, don't you think I look triumphant enough as it is?" she replied. "I exult in freedom; let others hug their chains. Besides, I have you to tyrannize over, so what do I want with a husband to plague?"

She looked radiant enough, if not triumphant, as she stood beneath the crimson apple-blossoms, with the

dappled sun-lights dancing over her, tossing the laughing boy above her curly head, her dark eyes sparkling and the rich tints glowing in her cheeks. "Marriage," she would sometimes say, in answer to such observations as this of Mr. Rickman's, "is not one of my foibles. I like my brother-men and cannot bring myself to make any of them miserable. And I like Miss Sibyl Rickman and her peace of mind, and I like to write what I think, which I could not do if married. Besides, what in the world would people do if there were no old maids?"

Edward and Alice knew that they would have been the poorer for her marriage, though they often wished it. Both were certain that she had conquered the early feeling which at one time threatened to make shipwreck of her happiness, and this certitude made their constant intercourse with Sibyl very happy.

Alice had wished not to live at Gledesworth. She did not care for the state and circumstance of the great house, and was oppressed by its traditions. She would rather have left the property with Paul, to be absorbed by his community, or passed it on to the next brother, but Edward soon convinced her that such schemes were impracticable, that responsibilities cannot be evaded, and finally that it was their duty to live, as much as his military life permitted, at Gledesworth, which had now become a charming home, the resort of a wide circle of friends and kinsfolk.

What with the provision for Paul's mother, and the slice taken out for the Dominicans, the Gledesworth

estate was so diminished that they were not overburdened with riches, and had to use some economy to meet the charges entailed by the possession of land. As for the hereditary curse, Annesley laughed that to scorn, and had many a merry battle of words with Sibyl upon the subject. The distich,* he argued, proved, if anything, its own falsity, since Reginald Annesley's affliction ought to have broken the spell, which nevertheless continued to work upon two successive heirs after him. But Sibyl maintained that Paul had broken the spell in the Dominican convent. Very likely Reginald had been immured in a brick building, she would affirm with profound gravity.

"Your godson, Sibyl," Edward said, taking the boy from her arms, "will die when it pleases God, not before. And if he does not live to inherit Gledesworth, it will not be because a widow cursed his ancestors centuries ago. It may be from his own fault or folly, indeed, though he is too like his mother to have many faults. Poor Reuben's children, I grant you, may inherit a curse." And so he thought, will Gervase's, but theirs will be the curse of a crooked nature.

Gervase Rickman was then actually walking along the grey-green ridge of down which rose behind the Manor against the pale April sky. Business had called him unexpectedly to Medington, which he represented, and, leaving his carriage in the high road, with instruc-

* "Whanne ye lord ys mewed in stonen celle,
Gledesworthe thanne shalle brake hys spelle."

tions to wait at the Traveller's Rest, he descended the slope and walked over the springy turf, looking down upon Arden and its familiar fields and trees, and upon the very garden where Alice and Sibyl were making cowslip-balls for the baby Annesley. The changeable April day clouded over as he walked and gazed; the blush of vivid green died from the trees and copses; the plain darkened and the shadows in the hill-sides deepened. The song birds were silent; the melancholy wail of a plover drew his attention to a single bird, fluttering as if wounded before him, and trying in its simple pathetic cunning to draw his attention away from the nest which that very cry betrayed.

On the bleak March day when he waited on that down outside the Traveller's Rest for Alice, he had thought much of the omnipotence of human will, and purposed to mould mankind to his own ends. Then he was an obscure country lawyer, nursing an unsuspected ambition in the depths of his heart. Now his name was in every one's mouth; he had climbed more than one step towards the height he intended to scale. The minister whose patronage had so early been his was now in office. He had approved himself to his party as a useful and almost indispensable instrument, particularly by the services he had rendered in the last general election which restored the Liberals to power. His financial skill was beginning to be recognized, his name had weight in financial society, which he affected. Everything he touched turned to gold. By his marriage

with Lady Charlotte he was connected with half the peerage and was son-in-law to a minister. Lady Charlotte, it is true, was neither so young as she had been, nor so beautiful as she might have been, nor was she well-dowered. She was known to have a tongue and suspected of having a temper; but she was a woman who knew the world both of politics and of society, and was the most useful wife a man in his position could possibly have. His ambition, great as it was, was being more rapidly gratified than even he had expected. He had gained the world, and lost his soul.

But to-day he no longer believed in the omnipotence of will and energy. He looked down upon the roofs of Arden and thought of the severe check his will had received there; he thought, too, of the unexpectedly favourable conjunction of affairs for him in other respects, and acknowledged another power, which he called destiny. What would the first Napoleon have done, he mused, in peaceful England at this end of the nineteenth century? If he had missed the Crimea and the Mutiny, he might have risen to be a half-pay officer; had he been in time for those crises, he might have been reckoned an excellent general, nothing more.

Beyond the unseen sea behind the hills rising before Rickman's eyes lay a country occupied by a hostile army and torn by revolution. Why had not destiny placed him there, where the hour was come, but not the man to rule it? An eager fancy could almost hear the far-off thunder of the war fitfully raging beyond that little

strip of sea, over whose quiet waters he actually heard the boom of English guns, fired only in peaceful practice, not at masses of living men. There, in the world's beautiful pleasure city, an agony beyond all the agonies of war was slowly wearing itself out through these pleasant spring months, an agony then hidden within the walls of Paris beleaguered by her own children, and never fully to be known. Gervase Rickman gave a passing thought to that tragedy and foresaw the flames and indiscriminate slaughter in which it was before long to terminate, when the Seine literally ran with French blood shed by French hands, the tragedy of an unbridled mob fitfully swayed by one or two fanatics in possession of a great city, and he wondered at the weakness of those who ought to have ruled.

Though he still believed more in men than in institutions, and scorned weakness above everything, he did not believe as he had done that day by the Traveller's Rest; his ambition had now risen from the vague of golden visions into the clearness of reality, and he could see how low was the highest summit within his reach. Yet it was the sole object of his life, he cared for nothing else. The human side of his character was paralyzed on the day when he lost Alice. It was not only that all his better instincts and nobler aspirations died the moment his life was cut off from all tender feelings and sundered from the purer influences of hers, but in losing her he had to a certain extent lost Sibyl, and drifted away from those earlier and stronger

ties which begin with life itself. Sibyl, the second good genius of his life, was never again on the old terms with him. Whenever they met there was an invisible, impassable barrier between them; perhaps she knew all and despised him, as, he knew, Alice despised him.

All his life long, through wealth and power and gratified ambition, he was to bear about the heavy pain of having lost not Alice only, but her respect, of having won not her love but her bitter scorn. He looked down upon the Manor, where she was so frequent a guest that he never went there himself without a previous intimation, lest they should meet, as it was tacitly understood they could not, and he yearned for the old days to live again, that he might act differently. Since he was fated not to win her heart, which he saw clearly now was beyond human volition, he might still have been able to look in her face and see the old tender friendly look in her eyes; and yet had he remained true to his better self, he could never have succeeded as he was to succeed when freed from scruples and rid of the importunities of conscience. He would have lost the world and saved his soul alive.

For some moments the old yearning returned with such force at the sight of the pleasant paths in which they had wandered together, that he thought he would have been content to remain all his life in that quiet spot, an obscure country lawyer, with Alice by his side, with his old father to care for and Sibyl to take pride in. Not that he did not now take great pride in Sibyl and

her increasing literary reputation, but it would have been different if the dark shadow had not come between them. But Lady Charlotte, who had been his wife four months, did not like Arden. Mr. Rickman bored her, she was afraid of Sibyl and looked down upon them all; he knew that she would put them farther and farther asunder and himself farther and ever farther from his nobler nature.

He leant upon the gate by which he was standing with Alice on that summer evening, when he uttered those two fatal words, "quite right," and reviewed all that episode in his life, the inclination first springing from a sordid thought of Alice's fortune, then fostered by the charm of her daily society, and strengthened by the strong purpose with which he pursued every aim, until it became a ruling passion, the frustration of which tore away one-half of his character. He had played skilfully and daringly, and he had lost through no folly, for who could dream that a man would rise from the dead to frustrate him? Will, skill, and fate were to him the sole rulers of things human. He did not recognize that nothing can stand which is not built upon the eternal foundations of truth and justice.

Nevertheless, as he continued to gaze on the old paternal fields in which he had passed his boyhood and youth, a vague regret for what he might have been, had he been only true to himself, rose and mingled with the piercing sense of loss and moral humiliation, which never wholly left him, and he turned

from Arden and walked on. Now his face was towards Gledesworth which lay unseen behind the down, and he gave one jealous passionate thought to the life Alice was living there with Edward Annesley, who was now no more shunned or shadowed by the reproach of an unproved accusation, and yet another thought to the strange death in life of Paul Annesley.

And just then the coast guns boomed over the peaceful waters again, recalling his thoughts to the tragedy beyond the sea. The group in the garden below heard the same low thunder, and Sibyl made some jesting allusion to the Annesley gun, which had just been triumphantly tested at Shoeburyness; and Edward thought of the deadly earnest with which French cannon were being fired on the other side of that sunny sea.

They did not know that, just then, under the walls of Paris, while some men wounded after a repulse were being placed in an ambulance, a shot from the fort behind them struck a friar who was in the act of lifting the last man, and killed him on the spot.

The wounded man groaned when his living support gave way, but other hands raised him, and the ambulance moved away from the dangerous spot, leaving the dead man behind in their haste. He was one of those Dominicans, who, from the first outbreak of the war, had been in the field with the French armies. In disengaging the slain friar from the man he was lifting, they had turned him so that he lay face upwards, his

arms outstretched as in the restful slumber of youth, his white dress stained crimson over the breast, his eyes closed to the spring sunshine, his scarred face wearing the sweet and peaceful smile often seen in the soldier killed in battle.

Thus Paul Annesley's troubled soul passed heroically to its rest.

Though they could not know what was happening beyond the sea, a vague sadness in keeping with the sudden overclouding of the spring day filled the hearts of those to whom the slain man had been dear, a sadness which passed like the cloud itself.

Even Gervase Rickman felt the passing gloom, and shaking off the gentler memories of his life, and walking quickly over the sunny turf where the scattered sheep were feeding, he reached the sign-post beneath which he was standing when Edward Annesley came singing by years ago. There his carriage was waiting by the Traveller's Rest, and he sprang into it and was quickly whirled out of sight.

The little group at Arden Manor were tranquilly sitting beneath the apple-trees. Mr. Rickman, forgetful of coins and antiquities, was patiently weaving daisy-chains for little Paul, who called him grandfather, and whom he loved more than the little Rickmans who came after him; Alice was relating the family news—the expected visit of her mother-in-law and Harriet to Gledesworth, the probability that Major McIlvray and Eleanor would follow them; Wilfrid's chances of pro-

motion and his intention to marry; the appointment of Jack, the youngest Annesley, to a ship, and the recent visit they had paid to Mrs. Walter Annesley, who was growing weaker day by day; the probability of Edward's retiring from active service.

The shadows lengthened and the Annesleys went back to their pleasant home. Sibyl returned to the wedding party, led the dancing and listened to the singing, and saw the bride and bridegroom start for their new home at the falling of the dusk.

When she was sitting by the hearth with her father that night she mused on the different ways in which human lives are ordered. As days of brilliant sunshine and blue skies are rare in England, so are lives of full and unclouded happiness in this world; but there are many sweet neutral-tinted days full of peace, in which plants grow and birds sing, and the clouds break away into soft glory at sunset. Sibyl's life was like one of these serene days; it was happy and by no means unfruitful.

THE END.

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